

MEMORY CELL IN WHICH THE CHANNEL PASSES THROUGH A BURIED DIELECTRIC LAYER

The field of the invention is that of semiconductor devices and more particularly that of memory devices comprising a plurality of memory cells.

The invention relates more particularly to a memory cell formed by an FET (Field-Effect Transistor) having a floating channel or a floating gate, and
5 also to a memory array consisting of a plurality of memory cells of this type.

Figure 1 shows a sectional view of a conventional floating-channel DRAM memory cell (DRAM being the acronym for Dynamic Random Access Memory). This cell is formed in an SOI (Silicon-On-Insulator) substrate comprising a thin silicon layer 3 separated from the semiconductor substrate
10 1 via a buried oxide layer 2 (BOX). A floating channel 4, a source region 5 and a drain region 6 are formed in the thin layer 3 above the BOX layer 2. A gate dielectric layer 7 and a control gate electrode 8 are deposited sequentially above the floating channel 4. The drain region 6 is connected to a bit line BL, the source region 5 is connected to a source line SL and the
15 gate electrode 8 is connected to a word line WL.

The floating channel is electrically isolated by the BOX layer, the gate dielectric layer, the source region and the drain region. Because of this isolation, the floating channel can store electrical charge, leading to the same result as with a capacitor.

20 During an operation of writing data into such a transistor, the floating channel stores charges through an impact ionization effect, thereby modifying the threshold voltage of the transistor. During a data read operation, the amount of current flowing between the source and the drain of the transistor thus depends on the quantity of charge stored in the floating
25 channel.

Although fabricating smaller transistors enables a larger number of them to be integrated on one and the same substrate, the scaling-down can lead to undesirable effects. In particular, FET transistors having a channel of relatively short length may have undesirable electrical characteristics known
30 as short channel effects (SCE).

Because of the continuous reduction in size of semiconductor devices, the SCE phenomenon proves to be increasingly problematic.

One solution for this reduction in physical dimensions of integrated circuits consists in forming what are called "buried gate" transistors that have
5 a gate region buried in the channel.

Unlike a conventional planar transistor for which the control gate electrode is formed on the surface of the substrate above the channel (being isolated therefrom by a gate dielectric layer), a buried-gate transistor has a control gate electrode that fills a trench formed in the thickness of the
10 channel.

Such a transistor, also known by the acronym RCAT (Recess Channel Array Transistor), is for example described in document US 2006/0220085.

By providing a gate region that extends into the substrate, the effective length of the channel is increased, thereby enabling the buried-gate RCAT
15 transistor to have a smaller SCE.

Although such RCAT transistors help to solve problems associated with channel size reduction in the case of 65 nm and 45 nm technologies, the fact remains that the volume of the channel is so small in the case of the next-generation (especially 32 nm) technologies that only a small quantity of
20 charge can then be stored therein. It will therefore be understood that a variation in only a few charges can then lead to relatively large perturbations.

To give an illustrative example, an SOI-based planar transistor can only contain a few tens of charges. The loss of only a single charge then represents signal loss of around 2%. Now, each access to a cell that shares
25 a connection with a cell in retention mode may potentially disturb said cell by "pumping" by coupling, for example one or more charges at each cycle.

There is therefore a need for memory cells that obviate the aforementioned drawbacks of the prior art due to the small channel volume. The objective of the invention is to meet these requirements and, for this
30 purpose, according to a first aspect, the invention provides a memory cell comprising:

- a semiconductor-on-insulator substrate comprising a thin layer of semiconductor material separated from a base substrate by an insulating layer;
- an FET transistor comprising a source region and a drain region that are arranged at least essentially in the thin layer of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate, a channel in which a trench is made, and a gate region in the trench,

characterized in that the trench extends into the depth of the base substrate beyond the insulating layer and in that the channel extends between the source region and the drain region at least essentially beneath the insulating layer.

Certain preferred, but non-limiting, aspects of this memory cell are the following:

- the drain region and the source region are arranged integrally in the thin layer of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate, and a channel conduction region is arranged at the insulating layer level on either side of the trench so that the channel extends between the source region and the drain region both above and beneath the insulating layer via the channel conduction region;
- the source and drain regions extend both above and beneath the insulating layer via a source conduction zone and a drain conduction zone respectively, the zones being arranged at the insulating layer level on either side of the trench, and the channel extends integrally beneath the insulating layer between the parts of the source and drain regions that are located beneath the insulating layer;
- the gate region is separated from the channel by a dielectric layer;
- that part of the channel beneath the insulating layer is formed by a well made in the upper part of the base substrate;
- the well is isolated from the remaining part of the base substrate by a layer of opposite conductivity to that of the well;

- the cell further includes lateral isolation regions of that part of the channel located beneath the insulating layer which extend depthwise beneath the insulating layer;
- the FET transistor is partially depleted and the cell furthermore
5 comprises lateral isolation regions of that part of the channel located above the insulating layer;
- the channel is floating and the gate region serves as control gate electrode for driving the FET transistor;
- the cell further comprises a bipolar transistor, the collector of which
10 serves as channel for the FET transistor;
- the source of the FET transistor serves as base for the bipolar transistor;
- the base substrate serves as base for the bipolar transistor; and
- the gate region is floating and the FET transistor further comprises a
15 control gate electrode isolated from the floating gate region via a dielectric layer.

According to another aspect, the invention relates to a memory array comprising a plurality of memory cells according to the first aspect of the invention.

20 According to yet another aspect, the invention relates to a process for fabricating a memory cell, characterized by the steps consisting in:

- forming a trench in the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate so that it extends beyond the insulating layer;
- covering the walls of the trench with a layer of semiconductor material;
- 25 – carrying out a recrystallization annealing operation on said material in such a way that the material recrystallizes:
 - in a single-crystal state in the regions located above and beneath the insulating layer;
 - in a polycrystalline state at the insulating layer level so as to
30 define the channel conduction region on either side of the

trench at the insulating layer level and the lateral faces of the trench;

- covering the walls of the trench with a dielectric layer; and
- forming a gate region by filling the trench.

5 According to yet another aspect, the invention relates to a process for fabricating a memory cell, characterized by the steps consisting in:

- forming, immediately beneath the insulating layer, a doped layer intended to define the source region and drain region that extend beneath the insulating layer on either side of the trench;
- 10 – forming a trench in the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate so that the trench extends beyond the insulating layer;
- covering the walls of the trench with a layer of semiconductor material;
- covering the walls of the trench with a dielectric layer;
- forming a gate region by filling the trench; and
- 15 – causing the dopant to diffuse along the walls of the trench at the insulating layer level from the source and drain regions located above and beneath the insulating layer respectively, so as to form the source conduction zone and drain conduction zone enabling the source regions and the drain regions, which extend above and beneath the insulating
- 20 layer, respectively, to be connected.

According to yet another aspect, the invention relates to a process for fabricating a memory cell, characterized by the steps consisting in:

- forming a first trench in the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate, the first trench extending from the surface of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate down to the base substrate;
- 25 – covering the walls of the first trench with doped spacers having a conductivity of the same type as those of the drain and source regions that are intended to extend above the insulating layer;
- forming a second trench in the first trench, said second trench
- 30 extending into the depth of the base substrate beyond the insulating layer from the bottom of the first trench;

- covering the walls of said second trench and of the first trench with a dielectric layer;
- forming a gate region by filling said second trench and the first trench; and
- 5 — forming localized source and drain regions immediately beneath the insulating layer on either side of said second trench by dopant diffusion from the spacers, the spacers serving, after dopant diffusion, as channel conduction zones and drain conduction zones respectively, in order to connect the source and drain regions that extend above and
10 beneath the insulating layer.

Other aspects, objects and advantages of the present invention will become better apparent on reading the following detailed description of preferred embodiments thereof, given by way of non-limiting example and with reference to the appended drawings in which:

- 15 - Figure 1, already presented above, represents a conventional floating-channel DRAM cell;
- Figure 2a represents a first embodiment of a DRAM memory cell according to the first aspect of the invention;
- Figure 2b is an enlarged view of Figure 2a illustrating the presence of a
20 channel conduction region on either side of the trench at the insulating layer level;
- Figures 3a and 3b show a variant of the cell according to the first embodiment of the invention, in which a bipolar transistor is associated with the FET transistor in order to inject charge into the channel of the FET
25 transistor, as a sectional view and as an equivalent electrical diagram respectively;
- Figures 4a and 4b show another variant of the cell according to the first embodiment, employing a bipolar transistor for charge injection into the channel of the FET transistor, as a sectional view and as an equivalent
30 electrical diagram respectively; and

- Figures 5a and 5b illustrate two variants of a second possible embodiment of a memory cell according to the first aspect of the invention.

Figure 2a shows a sectional view of a DRAM memory cell according to a first possible embodiment of the first aspect of the invention, comprising an FET transistor having a source S, a drain D and a channel C between the source and the drain.

The memory cell is produced on an SeOI (Semiconductor-On-Insulator) substrate, preferably an SOI (Silicon-On-Insulator) substrate, comprising a thin layer of semiconductor material separated from a base substrate by an insulating layer, for example a buried oxide layer BOX.

In the context of this first embodiment, the drain D and the source S are arranged integrally in the thin layer of the SeOI substrate.

The channel C itself extends both above and beneath the insulating layer. The difference in volume (typically by a factor of between 200 and 1000) between that part of the channel located above the insulating layer and that part of the channel located beneath the insulating layer is such that it is considered, in the context of the present invention, that the channel lies essentially beneath the insulating layer.

In the context of Figure 2a, the drain D and the source S are in contact with the insulating layer BOX so that the FET transistor is fully depleted.

The source S may thus be shared between two adjacent memory cells (along a row of a memory array lying in the plane of Figure 2a, the columns of the memory array lying perpendicular to the plane of Figure 2a). Such sharing enables the footprint of a memory cell to be reduced.

However, the invention is not limited to a fully depleted memory cell but also extends to a partially-depleted SeOI memory cell (not shown). It therefore proves necessary to isolate, in a conventional manner known per se, the cells along a row of the memory array so as to create the floating-channel effect. This is conventionally accomplished by means of lateral isolation trenches that extend depthwise from the surface of the substrate

down to the BOX layer. These trenches typically provide what is called STI (Shallow Trench Isolation).

The drain D is connected, in a conventional manner known per se, to a bit line BL. This bit line BL may extend along a row of the memory array, contacting the drain of each of the memory cells placed along this row.

The source S itself is connected to a source line SL. This source line SL typically lies perpendicular to the bit line BL, contacting the source of each of the memory cells placed along a column of the memory array. In the case already mentioned above shown in Figure 2a, in which the source is shared between two adjacent cells, a single source line SL then serves to address the sources of the two memory cells.

Returning to the description of Figure 2a, the source S typically comprises a highly doped (for example n^+ -doped) central zone 21 serving mainly for making contact with the source line SL and a lightly doped (for example n^- -doped) peripheral zone 22 surrounding the central zone and serving mainly for operating the transistor.

It should be noted that the drain D may also have a highly doped central zone 11 (n^+ -doped in the example) serving mainly for making contact with the bit line BL and a lightly doped peripheral zone 12 (n^- -doped in the example) surrounding the central zone and serving mainly for operating the transistor.

The example given here is an n-type FET transistor memory cell. However, it will be understood that the invention is not limited to this type of transistor, rather it extends also to a p-type FET transistor memory cell.

In the context of the invention, the channel has a trench and the FET transistor further includes a gate region G in the trench. The trench extends from the surface of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate beyond the insulating layer, depthwise into the base substrate.

The trench has a bottom and sidewalls connected together via the bottom. It will be recalled that, along a column of a memory array, the cells have isolation trenches for isolating the cells of the column from one another.

The gate region in the trench is thus bounded longitudinally by these isolation trenches.

A channel conduction region 30 (cf. Figure 2b, showing an enlarged view of the region circled in Figure 2a) is moreover made at the insulating layer level between the insulating layer and the sidewalls of the trench so that
5 the channel can extend between the source and the drain both above and beneath the insulating layer via the channel conduction region (the channel thus extending essentially beneath the channel in view of the difference in volume between that part of the channel located above the insulating layer
10 and that part of the channel located beneath the insulating layer).

The gate region G in the trench is separated from the channel C and from the channel conduction region 30 by a dielectric layer 31 deposited beforehand on the walls of the trench.

One possible way of producing the channel conduction region 30 is
15 explained in detail below.

The trench is firstly formed in the SeOI substrate so as to extend from the surface of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate beyond the insulating layer, depthwise into the base substrate. To do this, a trench mask having etching patterns with a diameter, for example, of around 40 nm is used.

20 The walls of the trench are then coated with a layer of semiconductor material, preferably silicon.

More particularly, amorphous silicon may be conformally deposited on the entire surface of the SeOI substrate (on the mask and along the sidewalls and the bottom of the trench). By using an amorphous material it is possible
25 in particular for the crystallographic arrangement of the material constituting the thin layer of the SeOI substrate not to be damaged.

Typically, the thickness of amorphous silicon deposited is less than the thickness of 10 atomic layers (5 nm).

Alternatively, ALD (Atomic Layer Deposition) may be used for
30 depositing a single silicon atom layer.

Next, a gentle etching step is carried out in order to remove the deposited silicon layer present above the trench mask.

Next, a recrystallization annealing operation is carried out on the silicon deposited along the walls of the trench, in such a way that the silicon
5 recrystallizes:

- in a single-crystal state in the regions of the trench located above and beneath the insulating layer;
- in a polycrystalline state at the insulating layer level so as to define the channel conduction region 30 on either side of the
10 trench between the insulating layer BOX and the walls of the trench.

The recrystallization at the insulating layer level takes place especially via recrystallization fronts coming from the semiconductor regions present above and beneath the insulating layer. Depending on the thickness of the
15 insulating layer, the recrystallization fronts may even meet.

Next, the recrystallized silicon layer is covered with a gate dielectric layer 31.

The trench is then filled in order to form the gate region G therein, for example by depositing doped polysilicon. As a variant, the gate region may
20 be metallized.

Returning to the description of Figure 2a, that part of the channel located beneath the insulating layer is preferably formed by a well 40 produced in the upper part of the base substrate. The well 40 may especially be isolated from the remaining part of the base substrate by a layer 50 of
25 opposite conductivity to that of the well (a layer of n⁻-type conductivity when the well is of p⁻-type conductivity in the example presented here of an n-channel memory cell biased with V_{dd} so as to force the diode created to be in reverse bias mode, the reverse reasoning applying to a p-channel cell).

The memory cell further comprises lateral isolation regions 60 of that
30 part of the channel located beneath the insulating layer which extend

depthwise beneath the insulating layer until reaching the layer 50 for isolating the well 40 from the remaining part of the base substrate.

It should be noted that these regions 60 fulfil the same function as the STI-type isolation regions placed above the insulating layer in the case of partially-depleted SeOI memory cells, as mentioned previously.

According to a first possible embodiment, these lateral isolation regions 60 of that part of the channel located beneath the insulating layer are isolation trenches produced using STI technology.

According to a second possible embodiment, these regions 60 are formed from a semiconductor material of opposite conductivity to that of the channel (n^+ -type conductivity in the example described here of a p^- -type channel region 40).

According to a preferred embodiment of the invention (shown in Figure 2a), the channel is floating and the gate region serves as control gate electrode for driving the FET transistor.

Thus, a DRAM memory cell is defined for which a write operation makes it possible, via an impact ionization effect, to store charges in the floating channel that extends both above and beneath the insulating layer BOX.

It will be understood that, in the context of the invention, the charge storage volume is particularly increased (cf. the 200 to 1000 factor mentioned previously) compared with that of conventional cells owing to the extension of the floating channel beneath the insulating layer.

In other words, the quantity of charge that can be stored in the floating channel of a cell according to the invention may remain relatively constant following the road-map of technological developments towards ever greater reduction in the size of semiconductor devices, or at the very least decrease less rapidly than might be observed with conventional cells.

In particular, the reduction in size of the semiconductor devices along the X and Y axes (along the rows and columns of the memory array) may be

compensated for by the floating channel buried more deeply beneath the insulating layer.

Moreover, the peripheral circuits (amplifiers and decoders) of a memory array consisting of memory cells according to the invention may remain in conventional SOI technology using planar transistors. This makes it possible
5 to reduce the problems of variability, power consumption, etc.

According to one embodiment of the invention (not shown), the gate region is floating and the FET transistor further comprises a control gate electrode isolated from the floating gate region by means of a dielectric layer.

10 Thus, a flash-type memory cell is defined for which a write operation makes it possible, by the phenomenon of hot carrier injection, to store charge in the floating gate region formed in the trench that extends into the channel beneath the insulating layer BOX.

In the context of this embodiment, the storage volume is itself increased
15 because of the larger size of the floating gate region formed in the trench that extends beneath the insulating layer.

This embodiment proves to be especially advantageous for reducing the overall size of power transistors requiring high operating voltages.

Figures 3a-3b and 4a-4b show two variants of the first embodiment of a
20 DRAM memory cell according to the invention. In these variants, a bipolar transistor is associated with the FET transistor in order to inject charge into the channel of the FET transistor. The collector of the bipolar transistor is thus formed by the channel of the FET transistor.

In the case of the variant shown in Figure 3a (Figure 3b illustrating the equivalent electrical diagram), the source of the FET transistor (bearing the
25 reference 9 in Figure 3b) serves as base for the bipolar transistor (bearing the reference 71 in Figure 3b).

In the context of this variant, the emitter 70 of the bipolar transistor is designed so that the source of the FET transistor serves as base for the
30 bipolar transistor. Typically, the FET transistor is a horizontal transistor and

the emitter is more precisely designed in such a way that the emitter/source assembly forms a vertical stack.

The emitter is preferably integrated into the source in a lower region of the latter. In the case described above, in which the source comprises a highly doped central zone 21 and a lightly doped peripheral zone 22 surrounding the central zone, the emitter 70 is then placed so as to be in contact with the central zone of the source while still being isolated from the floating channel by the peripheral zone 22 of the source. Here, the emitter is fully integrated into the source electrode between the central region 21 and the peripheral region 22 thereof.

In the case of a fully depleted SeOI memory cell, and as shown in Figure 3a, the BOX layer may also contribute to isolating the emitter from the floating channel.

In the case of the variant shown in Figure 4a (Figure 4b illustrating the equivalent electrical diagram), the base substrate – and more precisely the isolation layer 50 of the well 40 – serves as base for the bipolar transistor (bearing the reference 72 in Figure 4b).

The emitter 80 of the bipolar transistor is thus placed so as to be in contact with the base substrate (i.e. with the isolation layer 50 of the well in the example shown).

In the context of this variant, the emitter is placed in a lower part of a lateral isolation region 60 of that part of the channel located beneath the insulating layer, while still being separated from this isolation region 30 via a region which surrounds it, so as to isolate it from the floating channel, and which has the same type of conductivity as that of the base substrate (n^- -type region in the example).

The region 60 below which the emitter lies is then preferably formed from a semiconductor material of opposite conductivity to that of the channel (n^+ -type in the example).

In each of the two variants mentioned above, the emitter 70, 80 is connected to an injection line IL that extends parallel to the source line SL so

as to address the memory cells placed along a column of the memory array. This results in a particularly compact arrangement in so far as the injection line IL occupies no surface region.

5 The injection line IL may especially be made of a doped semiconductor material (p^+ -doping of the material of the thin layer in the case of the variant shown in Figure 3a and p^+ -doping of the material of the base substrate in the case of the variant shown in Figure 4a).

10 In the context of the second variant, the FET and bipolar transistors are practically independent so that each can be optimized without having to seek a compromise.

This second variant furthermore provides an additional node (via the base substrate serving as base for the bipolar transistor, and more precisely by controlling the voltage on the isolation layer 50 of the well 40, illustrated as GND in Figure 4b). This additional node offers greater flexibility in the case of
15 cell write/read operations.

The above description dealt with a first embodiment of a memory cell according to the invention for which the drain region and the source region are placed integrally in the thin layer of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate and for which the channel extends between the source region and
20 the drain region both above and beneath the insulating layer via the channel conduction region.

Two variants of a second embodiment of a memory cell according to the invention are described below with reference to Figures 5a and 5b, for which the source region S and drain region D each extend over two levels,
25 both above (91, 21, 22; 101, 11, 12) and beneath (92, 93; 102, 103) the insulating layer via a source conduction zone 90 and a drain conduction zone 100 respectively, these being arranged at the insulating layer level on either side of the trench. However, the source and drain regions are placed essentially in the thin layer in so far as the source region and the drain region
30 respectively located above the insulating layer have a substantially higher

volume (typically by a factor of 200 to 1000) than the source region and drain region respectively located beneath the insulating layer.

The channel C itself extends integrally beneath the insulating layer between the part 92, 93 of the source region located beneath the insulating layer and the part 102, 103 of the drain region located beneath the insulating layer.

In Figures 5a and 5b, the reference 91 (alternatively the reference 101) represents that part of the source region S (alternatively the drain region D) located above the insulating layer, consisting (cf. Figure 2a) of the central region 22 (alternatively 12) and of the peripheral region 21 (alternatively 11).

In the context of the variant shown in Figure 5a, the parts 92, 102 of the source and drain regions located beneath the insulating layer are formed by a doped layer which is located on the surface of the base substrate, immediately beneath the insulating layer, and the conductivity of which is of the n⁻-type in the example considered here of an n-FET transistor.

This doped layer comprises a source region 92 and a drain region 102 separated from each other by the trench.

In the context of the variant shown in Figure 5b, the parts 93, 103 of the source and drain regions located beneath the insulating layer are formed respectively by a localized source region and by a localized drain region, each placed immediately beneath the insulating layer on either side of the trench.

These localized zones 93 and 103 form source and drain reservoirs or pockets respectively. The channel extends integrally beneath the insulating layer between these reservoirs or pockets.

It should be pointed out that the variants shown in Figures 5a and 5b may be combined by adding the pockets 93, 103 to the doped layer 92, 102.

Moreover, these variants may be implemented both for fully depleted memory cells (the case shown in Figures 5a and 5b) and in the case of partially depleted memory cells (with in this case necessary STI isolation above the insulating layer in order to separate the cells from one another).

As in the case of the embodiment shown in Figure 2a, the memory cell of Figures 5a and 5b further comprises lateral channel isolation regions extending depthwise beneath the insulating layer until reaching the layer 50 for isolating the well 40 from the remaining part of the base substrate.

5 One possible method of producing the cell of Figure 5a is explained in detail below.

 The regions located beneath the insulating layer (well 40, emitter 80, layer intended to form the source 92 and drain 102 regions for example) are formed before any process for fabricating front-face transistors by implanting
10 dopants in the base substrate beneath the insulating layer.

 The trench is then formed in the SeOI substrate in a manner similar to that carried out for forming the cell of Figure 2a, the trench extending from the surface of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate beyond the insulating layer, depthwise into the base substrate.

15 As in the case of forming the cell 2a, the walls of the trench are then covered with a layer of semiconductor material, preferably silicon, by conformal deposition of amorphous silicon or deposition of silicon using the ALD technique.

 A gentle etching operation may also be carried out in order to remove
20 the deposited silicon layer present on top of the trench mask.

 Next, the gate dielectric layer 31 is formed along the walls of the trench. The trench is then filled in order to form the gate region G therein, for example by depositing doped polysilicon. As a variant, the gate region may be metallized.

25 Next, an annealing operation is carried out in order to make dopants diffuse along the walls of the trench at the insulating layer level from the source and drain regions located respectively above and beneath the insulating layer, so as to form, on either side of the trench, a source conduction zone 90 and a drain conduction zone 100. It should be noted that
30 the diffusion annealing operation recrystallizes the regions located beneath the insulating layer. In so far as the regions located above and beneath the

insulating layer do not necessarily have the same crystalline orientation, the junction between two single crystals is as perfect as possible, but not absolute. This is one reason why the doped layer beneath the insulating layer intended to form the source region 92 and the drain region 102 beneath the insulating layer has the same conductivity (n^+ -type in the example) as the source region 91 and drain region 101 located above the channel. This thus effectively avoids generating crystal defects in the channel (p^- -type) and incidentally promoting charge recombination deleterious to charge retention in the cell.

After the diffusion annealing operation, the source regions 91, 92 and drain regions 101, 102 then extend both above and beneath the insulating layer via the source conduction zone 90 and the drain conduction zone 100 respectively.

One possible method of producing the cell shown in Figure 5b is explained in detail below.

The regions located beneath the insulating layer (well 40, emitter 80 for example) are formed before any process for fabricating front-face transistors by implanting dopants into the base substrate, beneath the insulating layer.

Next, a first trench is formed in the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate, the first trench extending from the surface of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate down to the base substrate in such a way that the first trench has a thickness corresponding to the combined thicknesses of the thin layer and the insulating layer.

Next, the walls of the first trench are covered by spacers, which are n^- -doped in the exemplary embodiment of an n-transistor shown here. To do this, doped polycrystalline silicon is for example deposited.

Next, a second trench is formed in the first trench, said second trench extending depthwise into the base substrate from the bottom of the first trench, the spacers defining the opening of said second trench.

Next, the gate dielectric layer 31 is formed along the walls of said second trench. Said second and first trenches are then filled in order to form

the gate region G therein, for example by depositing doped polysilicon. As a variant, the gate region may be metallized.

Moreover, the localized source and drain regions 93, 103 immediately beneath the insulating layer on either side of the trench are formed by dopant diffusion into the base substrate from the spacers. The spacers thus define
5 the source conduction zone 90 and the drain conduction zone 100 serving as conduction layer for connecting the source and drain regions that extend above and beneath the insulating layer.

It will be understood from the foregoing that the invention is not limited
10 to a memory cell according to its first aspect, rather it also extends to a memory array comprising a plurality of memory cells according to the first aspect of the invention and also to a process for fabricating such a memory cell.

CLAIMS

1. Memory cell comprising:
 - 5 – a semiconductor-on-insulator substrate comprising a thin layer of semiconductor material separated from a base substrate by an insulating layer (BOX);
 - an FET transistor comprising a source region (S) and a drain region (D) that are arranged at least essentially in the thin layer of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate, a channel (C) in which a trench is
10 made, and a gate region (G) in the trench,
characterized in that the trench extends into the depth of the base substrate beyond the insulating layer (BOX) and in that the channel extends between the source region and the drain region at least essentially beneath the
15 insulating layer.
2. Memory cell according to Claim 1, in which the drain region and the source region are arranged integrally in the thin layer of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate, and in which a channel conduction region (30) is
20 arranged at the insulating layer level (BOX) on either side of the trench so that the channel extends between the source region and the drain region both above and beneath the insulating layer via the channel conduction region.
- 25 3. Memory cell according to Claim 1, in which the source and drain regions extend both above and beneath the insulating layer via a source conduction zone and a drain conduction zone respectively, the zones being arranged at the insulating layer (BOX) level on either side of the trench, and in which cell the channel extends integrally beneath the insulating layer between the parts
30 (92, 102; 93, 103) of the source and drain regions that are located beneath the insulating layer.

4. Memory cell according to one of Claims 1 to 3, in which the gate region (G) is separated from the channel by a dielectric layer (31).
5. Memory cell according to one of Claims 1 to 4, in which that part of the channel beneath the insulating layer is formed by a well (40) made in the upper part of the base substrate.
6. Memory cell according to Claim 5, in which the well (40) is isolated from the remaining part of the base substrate by a layer (50) of opposite conductivity to that of the well.
7. Memory cell according to one of Claims 1 to 6, which further includes lateral isolation regions (60) of that part of the channel located beneath the insulating layer which extend depthwise beneath the insulating layer.
8. Memory cell according to one of Claims 4 to 7 taken in combination with Claim 2, in which the FET transistor is partially depleted, furthermore comprising lateral isolation regions of that part of the channel located above the insulating layer.
9. Memory cell according to one of Claims 1 to 8, in which the channel is floating and the gate region serves as control gate electrode for driving the FET transistor.
10. Memory cell according to Claim 9, which further comprises a bipolar transistor (71, 72), the collector of which serves as channel for the FET transistor.
11. Memory cell according to Claim 10, in which the source of the FET transistor serves as base for the bipolar transistor (71).

12. Memory cell according to Claim 10, in which the base substrate serves as base for the bipolar transistor (72).

13. Memory cell according to one of Claims 1 to 8, in which the gate region is floating and the FET transistor further comprises a control gate electrode isolated from the floating gate region via a dielectric layer.

14. Memory array comprising a plurality of memory cells according to any one of Claims 1 to 13.

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15. Process for fabricating a memory cell according to Claim 2, characterized by the steps consisting in:

- forming the trench in the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate so that it extends beyond the insulating layer;
- 15 – covering the walls of the trench with a layer of semiconductor material;
- carrying out a recrystallization annealing operation on said material in such a way that the material recrystallizes:
 - in a single-crystal state in the regions located above and beneath the insulating layer;
 - 20 ○ in a polycrystalline state at the insulating layer level so as to define the channel conduction region (30) on either side of the trench at the insulating layer level (BOX) and the lateral faces of the trench;
- covering the walls of the trench with a dielectric layer (31); and
- 25 – forming a gate region (G) by filling the trench.

16. Process for fabricating a memory cell according to Claim 3, characterized by the steps consisting in:

- forming, immediately beneath the insulating layer, a doped layer intended to define the source region (92) and drain region (102) that extend beneath the insulating layer on either side of the trench;
- 30

- forming the trench in the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate so that the trench extends beyond the insulating layer;
- covering the walls of the trench with a layer of semiconductor material;
- covering the walls of the trench with a dielectric layer;
- 5 – forming a gate region by filling the trench; and
- causing the dopant to diffuse along the walls of the trench at the insulating layer level from the source and drain regions located above and beneath the insulating layer respectively, so as to form the source conduction zone (90) and drain conduction zone (100) enabling the
- 10 source regions (91, 92) and the drain regions (101, 102), which extend above and beneath the insulating layer, respectively, to be connected.

17. Process for fabricating a memory cell according to Claim 3, characterized by the steps consisting in:

- 15 – forming a first trench in the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate, the first trench extending from the surface of the semiconductor-on-insulator substrate down to the base substrate;
- covering the walls of the first trench with doped spacers having a conductivity of the same type as those of the drain and source regions
- 20 that are intended to extend above the insulating layer;
- forming a second trench in the first trench, said second trench extending into the depth of the base substrate beyond the insulating layer from the bottom of the first trench;
- covering the walls of said second trench and of the first trench with a
- 25 dielectric layer;
- forming a gate region by filling said second trench and the first trench; and
- forming localized source (93) and drain (103) regions immediately beneath the insulating layer on either side of said second trench by
- 30 dopant diffusion from the spacers, the spacers serving, after dopant diffusion, as channel conduction zones and drain conduction zones

respectively, in order to connect the source and drain regions that extend above and beneath the insulating layer.