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ELECTROLESS GOLD PLATED ELECTRONIC COMPONENTS AND METHOD OF PRODUCING THE SAME

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to electroless gold plating. In particular, the present invention relates electroless gold plating at neutral pH.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 The techniques for producing suitable metallic coating such as metallic pads for the electrical connection between electronic components are becoming increasingly demanding as the sophistication of electronic components increases. For example, special printed circuit boards (PCBs) with non-conducted circuitry are
15 often required for the fabrication of chip on board, ball grid array packages, multi-chip modules and chip scale packages. In many applications, gold pads are required for use in wire bonding or soldering techniques to interconnect the various electronic components.

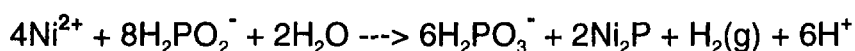
20 Different methods exist in the art for producing gold pads for wire bonding or soldering. They are commonly divided into the electroless techniques and the electrolytic (Ely) techniques. In both techniques, a barrier layer of metal is first deposited on the copper layer. The barrier



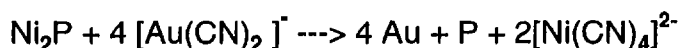
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layer is typically Ni₂P for electroless techniques, and metallic nickel for electrolytic techniques. This is followed by deposition of the gold layer. Electroless gold techniques are in turn subdivided into the immersion gold methods and the reducing electroless gold (ES) methods.

5 Immersion gold methods involve a direct displacement reaction between gold ions and metallic nickel whereby ionic gold becomes reduced while metallic nickel becomes oxidised. The technique typically involves a preliminary step of electroless plating of a nickel/phosphorus alloy (Ni₂P) onto a substrate such as a PCB board or
10 other electronic components using the following reaction:

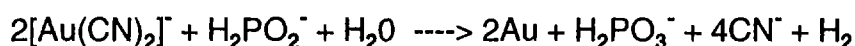


The Ni₂P plated substrate is then submerged in an immersion gold solution for the following redox reaction:



15 This two-step plating process is referred to as electroless nickel/immersion gold (ESN/IG) process. This reaction typically does not require a reducing agent. An ESN/IG plated pad (e.g. an input/output (I/O) pad on a PCB) is useful for soldering and aluminium wire bonding. However, the immersion reaction to deposit elemental
20 gold onto the nickel plating causes oxidation and corrosion of the Ni₂P deposit, resulting in the presence of a "black band" at the interface between the nickel layer and the gold layer. This gives poor results in gold wire bonding.

To improve gold wire bondability, JP 5222541 discloses a method in which a third electroless gold plating step (ESG) is performed after the above-described process i.e. ESN/IG/ESG. The general reaction for the ESG step is typically performed at acidic pH in the presence of a
5 reducing agent:



The additional gold layer gives good bondability if the thickness of the ESG gold layer is 80μin or above, provided the thickness of the intermediate IG gold layer is carefully controlled to around 0.1μm,
10 otherwise solderability is compromised. Furthermore, the undesirable "black band" corrosion problem remains unsolved.

To solve the "black band" corrosion problem, JP 98438 proposes the use of electroless palladium step before the immersion gold step (ESN/ESPd/IG). The pads produced by this method have
15 good gold wire bondability, but poor solderability. Furthermore, the thickness required for the palladium layer is quite high, and the use of two precious metals result in high costs.

The only method currently known in the art to produce metal pads that have both good solderability and good gold wire bondability is
20 electrolytic soft gold plating. This method, however, require that the plating surfaces be electrically connected for electrolysis, thus posing a severe limitation on board design. Furthermore, the thickness of the gold deposit lacks uniformity, being directly dependent on the distribution of current density.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a method of producing a metallic layer that solves the aforementioned prior art problems.

5 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, the present invention provides, in one aspect, an electroless gold plating method that minimises "black band" corrosion problem in the art. The electroless gold plating reaction according to present invention (referred to hereinafter as EG-1) may be performed
10 on a typical Ni_2P plated layer on a substrate. The EG-1 electroless gold plating solution is provided at neutral pH in the presence of a reducing agent to prevent corrosion of the Ni_2P plating on the substrate, and a complexing agent to maintain the gold ions in solution. The solution is further provided with an accelerator to increase the rate of reduction,
15 and to allow a gold layer of the desired thickness to be plated under manufacturing conditions. The product produced therefrom contains a substrate having a first Ni_2P layer plated by conventional electroless Nickel plating, and a second gold layer plated above the Ni_2P layer in the absence of a black band of phosphorus when traverse cross-
20 section of the product is observed under a scanning electron microscope of up to 10,000x magnification and using the technique of Energy Dispersive x-ray (EDX).

In a further aspect of the present invention, a second electroless gold plating step (hereinafter referred to as EG-2) is provided after EG-1

to further increase the thickness and purity of the gold layer. The plating solution for EG-2 may be the same the EG-1, or the gold ion concentration is preferably higher. The product produced thereof is also a substrate with a gold layer plated on a Ni_2P layer in the absence of a phosphorus black band.

The thickness of the gold layer plated according to the present method need only be 10-20 μin to achieve both good solderability and good gold wire bondability. This is thinner than the conventional soft gold pads, which typically require 25 μin thickness or higher.

The gold pad produced according to the present method possesses both excellent bondability and solderability.

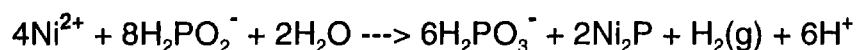
DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The following detailed description describes the preferred embodiment for implementing the underlying principles of the present invention. One skilled in the art should understand, however, that the following description is meant to be illustrative of the present invention, and should not be construed as limiting the principles discussed herein.

In the following discussion, and in the claims the terms "including", "having" and "comprising" are used in an open-ended fashion, and thus should be interpreted to mean "including but not limited to". As used herein, electronic components include electronic devices, integrated circuit devices, and printed circuit boards. Substrate include

dielectric material, epoxy and other material commonly used for packaging electronic circuitry and devices.

The electroless gold plating method according to the present invention is preferably used on a conventional electroless Ni₂P deposition onto a substrate surface. The Ni₂P acts as a barrier layer to protect the copper traces in the substrate. The substrate is typically made from organic material, e.g. epoxy or dielectric material for PCB fabrication. The Ni₂P deposition is performed by first cleaning the substrate by acid, followed by microetching to expose the surfaces to be plated. After treatment in an acid bath, the surface to be plated is then activated before electroless nickel plating occurs. The general reaction is as follows :



This is followed by electroless gold plating (EG-1) in a solution containing KAu(CN)₂, citrate salt as the complexing agent, sodium hypophosphite as the reducing agent, and thallium salt as the accelerator. The solution is maintain at a pH of between 6.5 to 7.0 and the reaction allowed to occur for 1-12 minutes. For a thicker layer of gold, a second electroless gold plating step (EG-2) may be performed by submerging in a solution containing the same components as the EG-1 solution, or a solution with a higher KAu(CN)₂ concentration. The citrate salt may be any salt of citrate including but not limited to sodium, potassium or ammonium salt. Citrate also functions as a buffer to maintain the solution at neutral or near-neutral pH. The Thallium salt

may be any salt of Thallium, including but not limited to chloride, bromide or acetate salt. The following examples describes the detailed process of the present invention :

EXAMPLE 1

STEP	SOLUTION	TEMP (°C)	INCUBATION TIME (minutes)
1. Acid cleaning	AF Cleaner 40-80mL/L (Autotech S.E.A. Pte Ltd.) 98% H ₂ SO ₄ 80-100mL/L	40-45	3-7
2. Microetching	Na ₂ S ₂ O ₈ 80-120g/L 98% H ₂ SO ₄ 20-60mL/L	ambient	1-5
3. Acid dip	98% H ₂ SO ₄ 20-60mL/L	ambient	2-4
4. Activation	Aurotech Activator 180-220mL/L (From Autotech S.E.A. Pte Ltd.) 98% H ₂ SO ₄ 40-60mL/L	20-25	1-3
5. Electroless Nickel plating (ESN)	Aurotech CNN-mod 140-160 ml/L Aurotech CNN-Part A 50-70mL/L 24% Ammonia water 10-30mL/L pH 4.8-5.3	80-90	20-30
6. Electroless gold (EG-1)	KAu(CN) ₂ 2-6g/L Sodium citrate 20-200g/L NaH ₂ PO ₂ 10-80g/L Thallium chloride 10-100ppm pH 6.5-7.0	85-95	1-12

TABLE 1

Table 1 shows an example of the process according to the present invention. A concentration range is given for each component of each solution within which the present invention may be practised. Steps 1 to 5 are conventional steps for electroless nickel plating according to Autotech S.E.A. Pte Ltd. and may be substituted for systems by other suppliers, e.g. by Uyemura & Co Ltd, Shipley-Ronal Singapore Pte. Ltd.

EXAMPLE 2

STEP	SOLUTION	TEMP (°C)	INCUBATION TIME (minutes)
6. Electroless gold (EG-1)	KAu(CN) ₂ 4g/L Sodium citrate 120g/L NaH ₂ PO ₂ 25g/L Thallium chloride 40ppm pH 6.7	90	12

TABLE 2

Table 2 shows another example of the electroless gold plating process, with the first five steps identical to those shown in Table 2. Following this example, a gold layer of approximately 2-5µin thickness may be obtained over the Ni₂P layer without visible corrosion. Visible corrosion is determined by the microscopic viewing a cross-sectional sample of a plated substrate traversing the various layers. The viewing is performed by a scanning electron microscope using EDX technique at up to 10,000x magnification.

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EXAMPLE 3

STEP	SOLUTION	TEMP (°C)	INCUBATION TIME (minutes)
6. Electroless gold (EG-1)	KAu(CN) ₂ 2-6g/L Sodium citrate 20-200g/L NaH ₂ PO ₂ 10-80g/L Thallium chloride 10-100ppm pH 6.5-7.0	85-95	1-12
7. Electroless gold (EG-2)	KAu(CN) ₂ 3-12g/L Sodium citrate salt 20-200g/L NaH ₂ PO ₂ 10-80g/L Thallium chloride 10-100ppm pH 6.5-7.0	85-95	10-100

TABLE 3

Table 3 shows a further example of an electroless gold plating method according to the present example in which EG-2 (step 7) is used after EG-1 (step 6). The first 5 steps are identical to Example 1, and may be substituted for other Ni₂P plating systems as discussed. The concentration and working ranges are indicated.

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EXAMPLE 4

STEP	SOLUTION	TEMP (°C)	INCUBATION TIME (minutes)
6. Electroless gold (EG-1)	KAu(CN) ₂ 4g/L Sodium citrate 120g/L NaH ₂ PO ₂ 25g/L Thallium chloride 40ppm pH 6.7	90	1
7. Electroless gold (EG-2)	KAu(CN) ₂ 10g/L Sodium citrate 180g/L NaH ₂ PO ₂ 40g/L Thallium chloride 60ppm pH 6.7	92	40

TABLE 4

Table 4 shows a further example of a method according to the present invention. Steps 1-5 are identical to those of Example 1. Using the specific method and solution provided in this example, a gold layer of 30µin may be obtained.

Table 5 below summarises the microscopy results of the present method in Example 4 compared to prior art methods.

METHOD	BLACK BAND	CORROSION
ESN/IG (12min., pH4.5) (Prior art)	Yes	Yes
ESN/IG (12min., pH4.0) (Prior art)	Serious	Serious
ESN/EG-1 (12min., pH 7.0)	No	No
ESN/EG-1 (12min., pH 7.0)/ EG-2(12min., pH6.7)	No	No

TABLE 5

Table 6 summarises results of bondability tests of products produced by various methods. The bonding test method involves the use of gold wires with one end (end "a") bonded to a gold ball of a component, and the other end bonded to a gold pad under test. During the testing process, the prescribed gold wire is pulled at increasing force until a break occurs. If the break occurs at the wire, then the failure mode is at points b,c or d. If the break point is at the gold ball end or the bonded gold pad end, the failure mode is referred to as mode "a" or "e" respectively. Results in Table 6 below show that bondability of a gold pad produced according to Example 4 is superior to the prior art EN/IG method.

Finish Type	ESN/IG (Prior Art)	ESN/ESPd/IG (Prior Art)	ElyN/ElyAu (Prior Art)	EN/EG-1/EG-2 (Example 4)
Thickness of each metal layer (μ in)	179/4.2	207/30/3.7	366/30	278/0.5/28.6
Average pull strength (g)	11.0	11.6	12.2	11.7
Failure Mode "a"	8	0	0	0
Failure Mode "b"	0	2	2	2
Failure Mode "c"	32	58	58	58
Failure Mode "d"	0	0	0	0
Failure Mode "e"	2	0	0	0
Bonding property	Poor	Good	Good	Good

TABLE 6

Table 7 below show results of ball shear testing to compare the solderability of gold pads produced by different methods. Ball shear testing involves the use of a shearing arm positioned adjacent the

prescribe solder ball. The prescribed solder ball is soldered by conventional reflow methods onto the gold pad under testing. The shearing arm is used to produce an increasing lateral shear force on the prescribed solder ball until breakage occurs. Failure mode "1" refers to breakage occurring at the solder joint. while failure mode "2" refers to a breakage of the ball itself. Table 7 shows that solder joints using electrolytic soft gold plating has the highest shear strength, exceeding 1,300g. The ESN/EG-1/EG-2 method according to Example 4 also possesses good shear strength with an average exceeding 1,000g.

Industry standard requirement for shear strength is a minimum of 800g for solder joints.

Finish Type	ESN/IG (Prior Art)	ESN/ESPd/IG (Prior Art)	ElyN/ElyAu (Prior Art)	EN/EG-1/EG-2 (Example 4)
Thickness of each metallic layer (μin)	180/4.0	180/30/10	500/30	300/0.5/25
Average Shear strength (g)	858	530	1373	1093
Failure Mode	1	1	2	1

TABLE 7

The test results described above were obtained from gold pads produced according to the present invention with a total gold thickness of at least 25 μin . In order to determine if the thickness of the gold layer of the present invention may be reduced, further tests were conducted.

Table 8 below shows the effect of increasing thickness of the gold layer produced according to the present method (ESN/EG-1/EG-2 as described in Example 4) on bonding property. Gold wire bonding test was conducted

as described for the method used in Table 6. These results show that good bondability is achieved even at a total thickness of only 10 μ in.

Table 9 below shows the effect of increasing thickness of the gold layer produced according to the present method (ESN/EG-1/EG-2 as described in Example 4) on solder joint strength. The Ni₂P layer produced by ESN is kept at 300 μ in in all cases. Solder ball testing was performed as described for Table 7. Results indicate that even at a thickness of only 2 μ in, gold pads produced according to the present invention exceed the industry standard requirement of 800g.

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Total thickness of gold layer (μ in)	Average pull strength	Failure mode	Bondability
8	14.21	b and e	Poor
10	15.06	b only	Good
13	14.77	b only	Good
16	13.89	b only	Good
18	13.89	b only	Good
20	13.34	b only	Good
22	13.55	b only	Good
27	14.29	b only	Good

TABLE 8

EG-1/EG-2 Total thickness (μ in)	Average shear strength	Failure Mode
25	1093	1
5	972	1
2	1004	1

TABLE 9

The above results indicate that good solderability and gold wire bondability can be achieved by the an electroless gold plating method according to the present invention. The thickness of the gold layer in the gold pad produced thereof may be as thin as 10 μ m, and still be able to meet the minimum industry standard for shear strength and pull strength.

CLAIMS

- 1 1. An electroless gold plating solution comprising $\text{KAu}(\text{CN})_2$; a gold ion
2 reducing agent for reducing gold ions to gold element; a gold ion
3 reduction accelerator for accelerating the rate of reduction of gold ions to
4 gold element; and a complexing agent for maintaining the solubility of
5 the gold ions; said solution maintained at pH 6.5-7.0.
- 1 2. An electroless gold plating solution according to claim 1 wherein said
2 gold ion reducing agent is NaH_2PO_2 .
- 1 3. An electroless gold plating solution according to claim 1 wherein said
2 gold ion reduction accelerator comprises Thallium salt.
- 1 4. An electroless gold plating solution according to claim 1 wherein said
2 complexing agent comprises citrate.
- 1 5. An electroless gold plating solution according to claim 1 wherein said
2 gold ion reducing agent is NaH_2PO_2 ; said gold ion reduction accelerator
3 comprises a chloride, bromide or acetate salt of Thallium; and said
4 complexing agent comprises a sodium, potassium or ammonium salt
5 of citrate.
- 1 6. An electroless gold plating solution comprising 2-12g/L $\text{KAu}(\text{CN})_2$;
2 10-80g/L NaH_2PO_2 ; 10-100ppm of a Thallium salt; 20-200g/L of
3 citrate; said solution maintained at pH 6.5-7.0.
- 1 7. An electroless gold plating solution according to claim 6 wherein the
2 concentration of said $\text{KAu}(\text{CN})_2$ is 2-4g/L; the concentration of said
3 NaH_2PO_2 is 20-30g/L; the concentration of said Thallium salt is 30-
4 50ppm; the concentration of said citrate salt is 120-140g/L; said
5 solution buffered to pH 6.5-7.0.

- 1 8. An electroless gold plating solution according to claim 6 wherein the
2 concentration of said $\text{KAu}(\text{CN})_2$ is 4-10g/L; the concentration of said
3 NaH_2PO_2 is 20-30g/L; the concentration of said Thallium salt is 50-
4 70ppm; and the concentration of said citrate salt is 120-180g/L; said
5 solution buffered to pH 6.5-7.0.
- 1 9. An electroless gold plating method comprising incubating a substrate
2 at 85-95°C for 1-60 minutes in a solution containing 2-12g/L
3 $\text{KAu}(\text{CN})_2$; 10-80g/L NaH_2PO_2 ; 10-100ppm of a Thallium salt; and
4 20-200g/L a citrate salt; said solution buffered to pH 6.5-7.0.
- 1 10. An electroless gold plating method according to claim 9 further
2 comprising the additional steps of rinsing said substrate and incubating
3 said substrate at 85-95°C for 1-60 minutes in a second solution
4 containing 2-12g/L $\text{KAu}(\text{CN})_2$; 10-80g/L NaH_2PO_2 ; 10-100ppm of a
5 Thallium salt; and 20-200g/L of a citrate salt; said second solution
6 buffered to pH 6.5-7.0.
- 1 11. (Amended) A method of producing at least one gold layer on a barrier
2 layer of an electronic substrate, said method comprising :
3 electroless plating a gold layer onto prescribed surfaces of said barrier
4 layer of said substrate by using a gold solution at pH 6.5-7.0, wherein
5 said gold solution comprises $\text{KAu}(\text{CN})_2$, and wherein said gold
6 solution contains an accelerator and a reducing agent, said gold solution
7 further preventing the corrosion of said barrier layer.
- 1 12. A method according to claim 11 wherein said barrier layer consists
2 essentially of Ni_2P .
- 1 13. A method according to claim 11 wherein said gold solution contains 2-
2 12 g/L $\text{KAu}(\text{CN})_2$.

- 1 14. A method according to claim 11 wherein said accelerator is Thallium
2 chloride, bromide or acetate.
- 1 15. A method according to claim 11 wherein said accelerator is 10-
2 100ppm Thallium chloride, bromide or acetate.
- 1 16. A method according to claim 11 wherein said reducing agent is sodium,
2 potassium or ammonium citrate.
17. A method according to claim 11 wherein said reducing agent is 20-
200g/L sodium, potassium or ammonium citrate.