

ADTST.026PCT

PATENT

CONTACT STRUCTURE AND PRODUCTION METHOD THEREOF
AND PROBE CONTACT ASSEMBLY USING SAME

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a contact structure and a
5 production method thereof and a probe contact assembly
using the contact structure, and more particularly, to a
contact structure having a large number of contactors in
a vertical direction, and to a method for producing such
a large number of contactors on a semiconductor wafer in
10 a horizontal direction and removing the contactors from
the wafer to be mounted on a substrate in a vertical
direction to form the contact structure such as a contact
probe assembly, probe card, IC chip, or other contact
mechanism.

Background of the Invention

15 In testing high density and high speed electrical
devices such as LSI and VLSI circuits, a high performance
contact structure such as a probe card having a large
number of contactors must be used. In other
20 applications, contact structures may be used for IC
packages as IC leads. The present invention is directed
to a production process of such contact structures to be
used in testing LSI and VLSI chips, semiconductor wafers,
burn-in of semiconductor wafers and die, testing and
25 burn-in of packaged semiconductor devices, printed
circuit boards and the like. The present invention can
also be applicable to other purposes such as forming
leads or terminal pins of IC chips, IC packages or other
electronic devices. However, for the convenience of
30 explanation, the present invention is described mainly
with reference to the semiconductor wafer testing.

In the case where semiconductor devices to be tested
are in the form of a semiconductor wafer, a semiconductor
test system such as an IC tester is usually connected to
35 a substrate handler, such as an automatic wafer prober,
to automatically test the semiconductor wafer. Such an

example is shown in Figure 1 in which a semiconductor test system has a test head 100 which is ordinarily in a separate housing and electrically connected to the test system with a bundle of cables 110. The test head 100 and a substrate handler 400 are mechanically as well as electrically connected with one another with the aid of a manipulator 500 which is driven by a motor 510. The semiconductor wafers to be tested are automatically provided to a test position of the test head 100 by the substrate handler 400.

On the test head 100, the semiconductor wafer to be tested is provided with test signals generated by the semiconductor test system. The resultant output signals from the semiconductor wafer under test (IC circuits formed on the semiconductor wafer) are transmitted to the semiconductor test system. In the semiconductor test system, the output signals are compared with expected data to determine whether the IC circuits formed on the semiconductor wafer function correctly or not.

In Figure 1, the test head 100 and the substrate handler 400 are connected through an interface component 140 consisting of a performance board 120 (shown in Figure 2) which is a printed circuit board having electric circuit connections unique to a test head's electrical footprint, coaxial cables, pogo-pins and connectors. In Figure 2, the test head 100 includes a large number of printed circuit boards 150 which correspond to the number of test channels (test pins) of the semiconductor test system. Each of the printed circuit boards 150 has a connector 160 to receive a corresponding contact terminal 121 of the performance board 120. A "frog" ring 130 is mounted on the performance board 120 to accurately determine the contact position relative to the substrate handler 400. The frog ring 130 has a large number of contact pins 141, such as ZIF connectors or pogo-pins, connected to the contact terminals 121, through coaxial cables 124.

As shown in Figure 2, the test head 100 is placed over the substrate handler 400 and mechanically and electrically connected to the substrate handler 400 through the interface component 140. In the substrate handler 400, a semiconductor wafer 300 to be tested is mounted on a chuck 180. In this example, a probe card 170 is provided above the semiconductor wafer 300 to be tested. The probe card 170 has a large number of probe contactors (such as cantilevers or needles) 190 to contact with contact targets such as circuit terminals or contact pads in the IC circuit on the semiconductor wafer 300 under test.

Electrical terminals or contact receptacles (contact pads) of the probe card 170 are electrically connected to the contact pins 141 provided on the frog ring 130. The contact pins 141 are also connected to the contact terminals 121 of the performance board 120 through the coaxial cables 124 where each contact terminal 121 is connected to the printed circuit board 150 of the test head 100. Further, the printed circuit boards 150 are connected to the semiconductor test system through the cable 110 having, for example, several hundreds of inner cables.

Under this arrangement, the probe contactors 190 contact the surface (contact target) of the semiconductor wafer 300 on the chuck 180 to apply test signals to the semiconductor wafer 300 and receive the resultant output signals from the semiconductor wafer 300. The resultant output signals from the semiconductor wafer 300 under test are compared with the expected data generated by the semiconductor test system to determine whether the IC circuits on the semiconductor wafer 300 performs properly.

Figure 3 is a bottom view of the probe card 170 of Figure 2. In this example, the probe card 170 has an epoxy ring on which a plurality of probe contactors 190 called needles or cantilevers are mounted. When the

chuck 180 mounting the semiconductor wafer 300 moves upward in Figure 2, the tips of the probe contactors 190 contact the pads or bumps (contact targets) on the wafer 300. The ends of the probe contactors 190 are connected to wires 194 which are further connected to transmission lines (not shown) formed in the probe card 170. The transmission lines are connected to a plurality of electrodes (contact pads) 197 which are in communication with the pogo pins 141 of Figure 2.

Typically, the probe card 170 is structured by a multi-layer of polyimide substrates having ground planes, power planes, signal transmission lines on many layers. As is well known in the art, each of the signal transmission lines is designed to have a characteristic impedance such as 50 ohms by balancing the distributed parameters, i.e., dielectric constant and magnetic permeability of the polyimide, inductances and capacitances of the signal paths within the probe card 170. Thus, the signal lines are impedance matched lines establishing a high frequency transmission bandwidth to the wafer 300 for supplying currents in a steady state as well as high current peaks generated by the IC circuit's output switching in a transient state. For removing noise, capacitors 193 and 195 are provided on the probe card between the power and ground planes.

An equivalent circuit of the probe card 170 is shown in Figure 4 to explain the limitation of the high frequency performance in the conventional probe card technology. As shown in Figures 4A and 4B, the signal transmission line on the probe card 170 extends from the electrode 197, the strip (impedance matched) line 196, the wire 194 and the needle or cantilever (contact structure) 190. Since the wire 194 and needle 190 are not impedance matched, these portions function as an inductor L in the high frequency band as shown in Figure 4C. Because of the overall length of the wire 194 and needle 190 is around 20-30mm, significant limitations

will be resulted from the inductor when testing a high frequency performance of a device under test.

Other factors which limit the frequency bandwidth in the probe card 170 reside in the power and ground needles shown in Figures 4D and 4E. If the power line can provide large enough currents to the device under test, it will not seriously limit the operational bandwidth in testing the device. However, because the series connected wire 194 and needle 190 for supplying the power (Figure 4D) as well as the series connected wire 194 and needle 190 for grounding the power and signals (Figure 4E) are equivalent to inductors, the high speed current flow is seriously restricted.

Moreover, the capacitors 193 and 195 are provided between the power line and the ground line to secure a proper performance of the device under test by filtering out the noise or surge pulses on the power lines. The capacitors 193 have a relatively large value such as $10\mu\text{F}$ and can be disconnected from the power lines by switches if necessary. The capacitors 195 have a relatively small capacitance value such as $0.01\mu\text{F}$ and fixedly connected close to the DUT. These capacitors serve the function as high frequency decoupling on the power lines. In other words, the capacitors limit the high frequency performance of the probe contactor.

Accordingly, the most widely used probe contactors as noted above are limited to the frequency bandwidth of approximately 200MHz which is insufficient to test recent semiconductor devices. In the industry, it is considered that the frequency bandwidth comparable to the tester's capability, which is currently on the order of 1GHz or higher, will be necessary in the near future. Further, it is desired in the industry that a probe card is capable of handling a large number of semiconductor devices, especially memories, such as 32 or more, in a parallel fashion to increase test throughput.

In the conventional technology, the probe card and

probe contactors such as shown in Figure 3 are manually made, resulting in inconsistent quality. Such inconsistent quality includes fluctuations of size, frequency bandwidth, contact forces and resistance, etc.

5 In the conventional probe contactors, another factor making the contact performance unreliable is a temperature change under which the probe contactors and the semiconductor wafer under test have different temperature expansion ratios. Thus, under the varying
10 temperature, the contact positions therebetween vary which adversely affects the contact force, contact resistance and bandwidth. Thus, there is a need of a contact structure with a new concept which can satisfy the requirement in the next generation semiconductor test
15 technology.

Summary of the Invention

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide a contact structure having a large number of contactors for electrically contacting with contact
20 targets with a high frequency bandwidth, high pin counts and high contact performance as well as high reliability.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a contact structure such as a probe card to establish electrical connection for testing semiconductor
25 devices and the like, having a very high frequency bandwidth to meet the test requirements in the next generation semiconductor test technology.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a contact structure to establish electrical
30 connection in applications such as testing semiconductor devices, which are suitable for testing a large number of semiconductor devices in parallel at the same time.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a contact structure and its assembly mechanism
35 for assembling a plurality of contact structures to form a probe contact assembly of desired size with desired number of contactors mounted on the probe contact

assembly.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a method for producing a large number of contactors in a two dimensional manner on a silicon substrate, removing the contactors from the substrate and mounting the contactors on a contact substrate in a three dimensional manner to form a contact structure.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a method for producing a large number of contactors in a two dimensional manner on a silicon substrate, transferring the contactors to an adhesive tape and removing the contactors therefrom for vertically mounting the same on a contact substrate to form a contact structure.

In the present invention, a contact structure for testing or burning-in semiconductor wafers, packaged LSIs or printed circuit boards (devices under test) are formed of a large number of contactors produced on a planar surface of a substrate such as a silicon substrate by a photolithography technology established in the semiconductor production process. The contact structure of the present invention can also be used as components of electronics devices such as IC leads and pins.

The first aspect of the present invention is a contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets. The contact structure is formed of a contact substrate and a plurality of contactors. The contactor is comprised of an intermediate portion which is inserted in the through hole provided on the contact substrate in a vertical direction, a contact portion which is connected to the intermediate portion and positioned at one end of the contactor to function as a contact point for electrical connection with a contact target, and a base portion which is provided at the other end of the contactor, and a spring portion having a cantilever shape upwardly inclined relative to the surface of the contact substrate and provided between the

base portion and the intermediate portion for producing a resilient contact force when the contactor is pressed against the contact target.

5 Another aspect of the present invention is a method of producing the contactors in a two dimensional manner on a silicon substrate and removing therefrom for establishing a contact structure. The production method is comprised of the following steps of:

10 (a) forming a sacrificial layer on a surface of a silicon substrate;

(b) forming a photoresist layer on the sacrificial layer;

15 (c) aligning a photo mask over the photoresist layer and exposing the photoresist layer with ultraviolet light through the photo mask, the photo mask including an image of the contactors;

(d) developing patterns of the image of the contactors on a surface of the photoresist layer;

20 (e) forming the contactors made of conductive material in the patterns on the photoresist layer by depositing the conductive material, each of the contactors having a spring portion which is cantilever shaped between a base portion and an intermediate portion;

25 (f) stripping the photoresist layer off;

(g) removing the sacrificial layer by an etching process so that the contactors are separated from the silicon substrate; and

30 (h) mounting the contactors on a contact substrate having through holes to receive ends of the contactors therein so that at least one end of each of the contactors functions as a contact pad for electric connection.

35 In a further aspect, the method of the present invention further includes, after forming the contactors by depositing the conductive material, a step of placing an adhesive tape on the contactors so that upper surfaces

of the contactors are attached to the adhesive tape.

In a further aspect, the method of the present invention further includes, after forming the contactors by depositing the conductive material, a step of placing
5 an adhesive tape on the contactors on the conductive substrate so that upper surfaces of the contactors adhere to the adhesive tape wherein adhesive strength between the contactor and the adhesive tape is larger than that between the contactor and a conductive substrate on which
10 the contactors are formed, and a step of peeling the conductive substrate so that the contactors on the adhesive tape are separated from the conductive substrate.

A further aspect of the second present invention is
15 a probe contact assembly including the contact structure of the present invention. The probe contact assembly is formed of a contact substrate having a plurality of contactors mounted on a surface thereof, a probe card for mounting the contact substrate and establishing
20 electrical communication between the contactors and electrodes provided on the probe card, and a pin block having a plurality of contact pins to interface between the probe card and a semiconductor test system when the pin block is attached to the probe card.

In the probe contact assembly, the contactors are
25 mounted vertically on a horizontal surface of the contact surface. Each contactor is comprised of an intermediate portion which is inserted in the through hole provided on the contact substrate in a vertical direction, a contact
30 portion which is connected to the intermediate portion and positioned at one end of the contactor to function as a contact point for electrical connection with a contact target, and a base portion which is provided at other end of the contactor, and a spring portion having a
35 cantilever shape upwardly inclined relative to the surface of the contact substrate and provided between the base portion and the intermediate portion for producing

a resilient contact force when the contactor is pressed against the contact target.

According to the present invention, the contact structure has a very high frequency bandwidth to meet the test requirements of next generation semiconductor technology. Since the large number of contactors are produced at the same time on the substrate without involving manual handling, it is possible to achieve consistent quality, high reliability and long life in the contact performance as well as low cost. Further, because the contactors are assembled on the same substrate material as that of the device under test, it is possible to compensate positional errors caused by temperature changes.

Further, according to the present invention, the production process is able to produce a large number of contactors in a horizontal direction on the silicon substrate by using relatively simple technique. Such contactors are removed from the substrate and mounted on a contact substrate in a vertical direction. The contact structure produced by the present invention are low cost and high efficiency and have high mechanical strength and reliability.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram showing a structural relationship between a substrate handler and a semiconductor test system having a test head.

Figure 2 is a diagram showing an example of more detailed structure for connecting the test head of the semiconductor test system to the substrate handler through an interface component.

Figure 3 is a bottom view showing an example of the probe card having an epoxy ring for mounting a plurality of probe contactors (needles or cantilevers) in the conventional technology.

Figures 4A-4E are circuit diagrams showing equivalent circuits of the probe card of Figure 3.

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram showing an example of contact structure of the present invention using contactors produced in a horizontal direction on a semiconductor substrate and vertically mounted on a contact substrate.

Figures 6A and 6B are schematic diagrams showing a basic concept of production method of the present invention in which a large number of contactors are formed on a planar surface of a substrate and removed therefrom for later processes.

Figures 7A-7C are diagrams showing a specific example of contactor of the present invention wherein Figure 7A is a front view of the contactor, Figure 7B is a side view of the contactor, and Figure 7C is a bottom view of the contactor.

Figures 8A-8L are schematic diagrams showing an example of production process in the present invention for producing the contactors of the present invention.

Figures 9A-9D are schematic diagrams showing another example of production process in the present invention for producing the contactors of the present invention.

Figures 10A-10N are schematic diagrams showing an example of process for producing the contactors of the present invention on the horizontal surface of a substrate and transferring the contactors to an intermediate plate.

Figures 11A and 11B are schematic diagrams showing an example of pick and place mechanism and its process for picking the contactors and placing the same on a substrate such as a multi-layered silicon substrate to produce the contact structure of the present invention.

Figure 12 is a cross sectional view showing an example of probe contact assembly using the contact structure of the present invention as an interface between a semiconductor device under test and a test head of a semiconductor test system.

Figure 13 is a cross sectional view showing another

example of probe contact assembly using the contact structure of the present invention as an interface between a semiconductor device under test and a test head of a semiconductor test system.

5 Figure 14 is a schematic diagram showing an example of contact structure of the present invention having a multi-layered standard silicon substrates and the contactors produced through the production process of the present invention.

10 Figure 15 is a perspective view showing a plurality of contact structures of the present invention each having a large number of contactors for assembling with one another to constitute a probe contact assembly of desired size.

15 Figure 16 is a perspective view of the contact structure of the present invention wherein plural contact substrates are connected with one another to establish a probe contact assembly with desired size, shape and number of contactors.

20 Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Figure 5 shows an example of contact structure of the present invention. The contact structure is configured by a contact substrate 20 and contactors 30. In an application of semiconductor testing, the contact structure is positioned, for example, over a semiconductor device such as a semiconductor wafer 300 to be tested. When the semiconductor wafer 300 is moved upward, the lower ends of the contactors 30 contact with contact pads 320 on the semiconductor wafer 300 to establish electrical communication therebetween. The contactors 30 are mounted on the contact substrate 20 via through holes (not shown) at the middle portion so that an upper portion and a lower portion of the contactor are projected from the contact substrate 20. The middle portion of the contactor 30 may be loosely coupled to the contact substrate 20 so that the contactor 30 is movable when the contact structure is pressed against a contact

target, i.e., the semiconductor wafer 300.

In the example of Figure 5, each contactor 30 has a cantilever like shape over the contact substrate 20 which extends diagonally upwardly to an upper end 33. The lower part of the contact is substantially straight extending downwardly to a lower end 35. In the semiconductor test application, the upper end 33 is a base portion of the contactor 30 to contact with a probe card of the test system and the lower end 35 is a contact point of the contactor 30 to contact with the contact pad 320 on the semiconductor wafer 300.

The cantilever (spring) portion of the contactor 30 functions as a spring to produce a resilient force when the upper end is fixed to the probe card and the lower end is pressed against the contact target. The lower end (contact point) 35 of the contactor 30 is preferably sharpened to be able to scrub the surface of the contact pad 320. The resilient force promotes such a scrubbing effect at the lower end (contact point) 35 against the surface of contact pad 320. Such a scrubbing effect promotes an improved contact performance when the contact point scrubs the oxide surface of the contact pad 320 to electrically contact the conductive material of the contact pad 320 under the oxide surface.

Figure 6A-6B show basic concept of the present invention for producing such contactors. In the present invention, as shown in Figure 6A, contactors 30 are produced on a planar surface of a substrate 40 which is a silicon substrate or other dielectric substrate in a horizontal direction, i.e., in a two dimensional manner. Then, the contactors 30 are removed from the substrate 40 to be mounted on the contact substrate 20 of Figure 5 such as a ceramic substrate, a printed circuit board, IC chip, or other contact mechanism in a vertical direction, i.e., in a three dimensional manner.

In the example of Figure 6B, the contactors 30 are produced on a planar surface of a silicon or other

dielectric substrate 40 in the horizontal direction in the manner shown in Figure 6. Then, the contactors 30 are transferred from the substrate 40 to an adhesive member 90, such as an adhesive tape, adhesive film or adhesive plate (collectively "adhesive tape" or "intermediate plate"). The contactors 30 on the adhesive tape 90 are removed therefrom to be mounted on the contact substrate 20 of Figures 5 in a vertical direction, i.e., in a three dimensional manner with use of a pick and place mechanism.

Figures 7A-7C show a specific example of the contactor of the present invention wherein Figure 7A is a front view, Figure 7B is a side view, and Figure 7C is a bottom view thereof. The contactor 30 of Figure 7 has an upper end (base portion) 33, a middle point having a jaw (flange) 34, a spring portion (cantilever) having a diagonal beam running between the upper end and the middle point, a straight portion 36 and a lower end 35 having a contact point.

The upper end 33 contacts with a probe card such as shown in Figure 12 and the lower end 35 contacts with the contact target such as a semiconductor wafer under test. When mounted on the contact substrate 20 of Figure 5 or Figures 12-14, the upper end 33 and the spring portion (cantilever) are projected from the upper surface of the contact substrate 20 and the lower end 35 is projected from the lower surface of the contact substrate 20. The straight portion 36 is inserted in the through hole of the contact substrate while the jaw (flange) 34 functions as a stopper against the upper surface of the contact substrate 20 as shown in Figure 14.

In the front view of Figure 7A, the straight portion 36 preferably has a reduced width which promotes the spring action by the spring portion and the middle portion. In this example, as shown in the side view of Figure 7B and the bottom view of Figure 7C, the contactor 30 has the same thickness throughout. Thus, when

producing the contactor 30 on the planar surface of the silicon substrate 40 of Figure 6A, only one deposition process may be required for forming the contactor by conductive material. In the case where the contactor 30 has two or more different thickness, conductive materials may be deposited two or more times to form two or more layers of conductive material in the production process. The example of size in the contactor of Figure 7 is: $a=400\mu\text{m}$, $b=50\mu\text{m}$, $c=50\mu\text{m}$, $d=50\mu\text{m}$, $e=140\mu\text{m}$, $f=900\mu\text{m}$, $g=1600\mu\text{m}$, $h=100\mu\text{m}$, $i=50\mu\text{m}$, $j=3100\mu\text{m}$, and $k=1900\mu\text{m}$.

Figures 8A-8L are schematic diagrams showing an example of production process for producing the contactor 30 of the present invention. In Figure 8A, a sacrificial layer 42 is formed on a substrate 40 which is typically a silicon substrate. Other dielectric substrate is also feasible such as a glass substrate and a ceramic substrate. The sacrificial layer 42 is made, for example, of silicon dioxide (SiO_2) through a deposition process such as a chemical vapor deposition (CVD). The sacrificial layer 42 is to separate contactors 30 from the silicon substrate in the later stage of the production process.

An adhesion promoter layer 44 is formed on the sacrificial layer 42 as shown in Figure 8B through, for example, an evaporation process. An example of material for the adhesion promoter layer 44 includes chromium (Cr) and titanium (Ti) with a thickness of about 200-1,000 angstrom, for example. The adhesion promoter layer 44 is to facilitate the adhesion of conductive layer 46 of Figure 8C on the silicon substrate 40. The conductive layer 46 is made, for example, of copper (Cu) or nickel (Ni), with a thickness of about 1,000-5,000 angstrom, for example. The conductive layer 46 is to establish electrical conductivity for an electroplating process in the later stage.

In the next process, a photoresist layer 48 is formed on the conductive layer 46 over which a photo mask

50 is precisely aligned to be exposed with ultraviolet (UV) light as shown in Figure 8D. The photo mask 50 shows a two dimensional image of the contactor 30 which will be developed on the photoresist layer 48. As is well known in the art, positive as well as negative photoresist can be used for this purpose. If a positive acting resist is used, the photoresist covered by the opaque portions of the mask 50 hardens (cure) after the exposure. Examples of photoresist material include Novolak (M-Cresol-formaldehyde), PMMA (Poly Methyl Methacrylate), SU-8 and photo sensitive polyimide. In the development process, the exposed part of the resist can be dissolved and washed away, leaving a photoresist layer 48 of Figure 8E having an opening or pattern "A". Thus, the top view of Figure 8F shows the pattern or opening "A" on the photoresist layer 48 having the image (shape) of the contactor 30.

In the photolithography process in the foregoing, instead of using the UV light, it is also possible to expose the photoresist layer 48 with an electron beam or X-rays as is known in the art. Further, it is also possible to directly write the image of the contact structure on the photoresist layer 48 by exposing the photoresist 48 with a direct write electron beam, X-ray or light source (laser).

The conductive material such as copper (Cu), nickel (Ni), aluminum (Al), rhodium (Rh), palladium (Pd), tungsten (W) or other metal, nickel-cobalt (NiCo) or other alloy combinations thereof is deposited (electroplated) in the pattern "A" of the photoresist layer 48 to form the contactor 30 as shown in Figure 8G. Preferably, a contact material which is different from that of the conductive layer 46 should be used to differentiate etching characteristics from one another as will be described later. The over plated portion of the contactor 30 in Figure 8G is removed in the grinding (planarizing) process of Figure 8H.

The above noted process may be repeated for producing contactors having different thickness by forming two or more conductive layers. Namely, after forming a first layer of the contactors (conductive material), if necessary, the processes of Figures 8D-8H are repeated to form a second layer or further layer on the first layer of the contactors. In the next process, the photoresist layer 48 is removed in a resist stripping process as shown in Figure 8I. Typically, the resist layer 48 is removed by wet chemical processing. Other examples of stripping are acetone-based stripping and plasma O₂ stripping. In Figure 8J, the sacrificial layer 42 is etched away so that the contactor 30 is separated from the silicon substrate 40. Another etching process is conducted so that the adhesion promoter layer 44 and the conductive layer 46 are removed from the contactor 30 as shown in Figure 8K.

The etching condition can be selected to etch the layers 44 and 46 but not to etch the contactor 30. In other words, to etch the conductive layer 46 without etching the contactor 30, as noted above, the conductive material used for the contactor 30 must be different from the material of the conductive layer 46. Finally, the contactor 30 is separated from any other materials as shown in the perspective view of Figure 8L. Although the production process in Figures 8A-8L shows only one contactor 30, in an actual production process, as shown in Figures 6A and 6B, a large number of contactors are produced at the same time.

Figures 9A-9D are schematic diagrams showing an example of production process for producing the contactors of the present invention. In this example, an adhesive tape (intermediate plate) 90 is incorporated in the production process to transfer the contactors 30 from the silicon substrate 40 to the adhesive tape. Figures 9A-9D only show the latter part of the production process in which the adhesive tape 90

is involved.

Figure 9A shows a process which is equivalent to the process shown in Figure 8I where the photoresist layer 48 is removed in the resist stripping process. Then, also in the process of Figure 9A, an adhesive tape (intermediate plate) 90 is placed on an upper surface of the contactor 30 so that the contactor 30 adheres to the adhesive tape 90. As noted above with reference to Figure 6B, within the context of the present invention, the adhesive tape (intermediate plate) 90 includes other types of adhesive member, such as an adhesive film and adhesive plate, and the like. The adhesive tape 90 also includes any member which attracts the contactor 30 such as a magnetic plate or tape, an electrically charged plate or tape, and the like.

In the process shown in Figure 9B, the sacrificial layer 42 is etched away so that the contactor 30 on the adhesive tape 90 is separated from the silicon substrate 40. Another etching process is conducted so that the adhesion promoter layer 44 and the conductive layer 46 are removed from the contactor 30 as shown in Figure 9C.

As noted above, in order to etch the conductive layer 46 without etching the contactor 30, the conductive material used for the contactor 30 must be different from the material of the conductive layer. Although the production process in Figures 9A-9C shows only one contactor, in an actual production process, a large number of contactors are produced at the same time. Thus, a large number of contactors 30 are transferred to the adhesive tape 90 and separated from the silicon substrate and other materials as shown in the top view of Figure 9D.

Figures 10A-10N are schematic diagrams showing a further example of production process for producing the contactor 30 where the contactors are transferred to the adhesive tape or intermediate plate. In Figure 10A, an electroplate seed (conductive) layer 342 is formed on a

substrate 340 which is typically a silicon or glass substrate. The seed layer 342 is made, for example, of copper (Cu) or nickel (Ni), with a thickness of about 1,000-5,000 angstrom, for example. A chrome-inconel layer 344 is formed on the seed layer 342 as shown in Figure 10B through, for example, a sputtering process.

In the next process in Figure 10C, a conductive substrate 346 is formed on the chrome-inconel layer 344. The conductive substrate 346 is made, for example, of nickel-cobalt (NiCo) with a thickness of about 100-130 μ m. After passivating the conductive substrate 346, a photoresist layer 348 with a thickness of about 100-120 μ m is formed on the conductive substrate 346 in Figure 10D and a photo mask 350 is precisely aligned so that the photoresist layer 348 is exposed with ultraviolet (UV) light as shown in Figure 10E. The photo mask 350 shows a two dimensional image of the contactor 30 which will be developed on the surface of the photoresist layer 348.

In the development process, the exposed part of the resist can be dissolved and washed away, leaving a photoresist layer 348 of Figure 10F having a plating pattern transferred from the photo mask 350 having the image (shape) of the contactor 30. In the step of Figure 10G, contactor material is electroplated in the plating pattern on the photoresist layer 348 with a thickness of about 50-60 μ m. An example of the conductive material is nickel-cobalt (NiCo). The nickel-cobalt contactor material will not strongly adhere to the conductive substrate 346 made of nickel-cobalt.

In the case where the contactor has two or more different thickness, the above noted process may be repeated for producing the contactor by forming two or more conductive layers. Namely, after forming a first layer of the contactors, if necessary, the processes of Figures 10D-10G are repeated to form a second layer or further layers on the first layer of the contactors.

In the next process, the photoresist layer 348 is

removed in a resist stripping process as shown in Figure 10H. In Figure 10I, the conductive substrate 346 is peeled from the chrome-inconel layer 344 on the substrate 340. The conductive substrate 346 is a thin substrate on which the contactors 30 are mounted with a relatively weak adhesive strength. The top view of the conductive substrate 346 having the contactors 30 is shown in Figure 10J.

Figure 10K shows a process in which an adhesive tape (intermediate plate) 90 is placed on an upper surface of the contactors 30. The adhesive strength between the adhesive tape 90 and the contactors 30 is greater than that between the contactors 30 and the conductive substrate 346. Thus, when the adhesive tape 90 is removed from the conductive substrate 346, the contactors 30 are transferred from the conductive substrate 346 to the adhesive tape 90 as shown in Figure 10L. Figure 10M shows a top view of the adhesive tape 90 having the contactors 30 thereon and Figure 10N is a cross sectional view of the adhesive tape 90 having the contactors 30 thereon.

Figures 11A and 11B are schematic diagrams showing an example of process for picking the contactors 30 from the adhesive tape (intermediate plate) 90 and placing the contactors on the contact substrate 20. The pick and place mechanism of Figures 11A and 11B is advantageously applied to the contactors produced by the production process of the present invention described with reference to Figures 9A-9D and Figures 10A-10N involving the adhesive tape. Figure 11A is a front view of the pick and place mechanism 80 showing the first half process of the pick and place operation. Figure 11B is a front view of the pick and place mechanism 80 showing the second half process of the pick and place operation.

In this example, the pick and place mechanism 80 is comprised of a transfer mechanism 84 to pick and place the contactors 30, mobile arms 86 and 87 to allow

movements of the transfer mechanism 84 in X, Y and Z directions, tables 81 and 82 whose positions are adjustable in X, Y and Z directions, and a monitor camera 78 having, for example, a CCD image sensor therein. The transfer mechanism 84 includes a suction arm 85 that performs suction (pick operation) and suction release (place operation) operations for the contactors 30. The suction force is created, for example, by a negative pressure such as vacuum. The suction arm 85 rotates in a predetermined angle such as 90 degrees.

In operation, the adhesive tape 90 having the contactors 30 and the contact substrate 20 having the bonding locations 32 (or through holes) are positioned on the respective tables 81 and 82 on the pick and place mechanism 80. As shown in Figure 11A, the transfer mechanism 80 picks the contactor 30 from the adhesive tape 90 by suction force of the suction arm 85. After picking the contactor 30, the suction arm 85 rotates by 90 degrees, for example, as shown in Figure 11B. Thus, the orientation of the contactor 30 is changed from the horizontal direction to the vertical direction. This orientation change mechanism is just an example, and a person skilled in the art knows that there are many other ways to change the orientation of the contactors. The transfer mechanism 80 then places the contactor 30 on the bonding location 32 (or through holes) on the substrate 20. The contactor 30 is attached to the contact substrate 20 by being bonded to the surface or inserted in the through holes.

Figure 12 is a cross sectional view showing an example of total stack-up structure for forming a probe contact assembly using the contact structure of the present invention. The probe contact assembly is used as an interface between the semiconductor wafer 300 under test (DUT) and the test head such as shown in Figure 2. In this example, the probe contact assembly includes a routing board (probe card) 260, and a pogo-pin block

(frog ring) 130 provided over the contact structure in the order shown in Figure 12.

The contact structure is configured by a plurality of contactors 30 mounted on the contact substrate 20. A
5 base portion 33 of each of the contactors 30 is projected at an upper surface of the contact substrate 20. A contact portion 35 is projected from a lower surface of the contact substrate 20. In the present invention, a
10 spring portion between the base portion 33 and the intermediate portion that is coupled to the contact substrate 20 has a cantilever shape inclined upwardly from the contact substrate. The contactors 30 may be slightly loosely inserted in through holes on the contact
15 substrate 20 in a manner allowing a small movement in the vertical direction when pressed against the semiconductor wafer 300 and the probe card 260.

The probe card 260, pogo-pin block 130 and contact structure are mechanically as well as electronically connected with one another, thereby forming a probe
20 contact assembly. Thus, electrical paths are created from the contact point of the contactors 30 to the test head 100 through the cables 124 and performance board 120 (Figure 2). Thus, when the semiconductor wafer 300 and the probe contact assembly are pressed with each other,
25 electrical communication will be established between the contact pads 320 on the wafer 300 and the test system.

The pogo-pin block (frog ring) 130 is equivalent to the one shown in Figure 2 having a large number of pogo-pins to interface between the probe card 260 and the
30 performance board 120. At upper ends of the pogo-pins, cables 124 such as coaxial cables are connected to transmit signals to printed circuit boards (pin electronics cards) 150 in the test head 100 in Figure 2 through the performance board 120. The probe card 260
35 has a large number of electrodes 262 and 265 on the upper and lower surfaces thereof. When assembled, the base portions 33 of the contactors 30 contact the electrodes

262. The electrodes 262 and 265 are connected through interconnect traces 263 to fan-out the pitch of the contact structure to meet the pitch of the pogo-pins in the pogo-pin block 130. Because the contactors 30 are loosely inserted in the through holes of the contact substrate 20, the springs (cantilevers) of the contactors 30 produce resilient contact forces toward the electrodes 262 as well as toward the contact pads 320 when pressed against the semiconductor wafer 300.

Figure 13 is a cross sectional view showing another example of probe contact assembly using the contact structure of the present invention. The probe contact assembly is used as an interface between the device under test (DUT) and the test head such as shown in Figure 2. In this example, the probe contact assembly includes a conductive elastomer 250, a probe card 260, and a pogo-pin block (frog ring) 130 provided over the contact structure. Since the contactor 30 has the spring (cantilever) between the base portion 33 and the middle portion as mentioned above, such a conductive elastomer is usually unnecessary. However, the conductive elastomer may be still useful for compensating the unevenness of the gaps (planarity) between the probe card 260 and the contact structure.

The conductive elastomer 250 is provided between the contact structure and the probe card 260. When assembled, the base portions 33 of the contactors 30 contact the conductive elastomer 250. The conductive elastomer 250 is an elastic sheet having a large number of conductive wires in a vertical direction. For example, the conductive elastomer 250 is comprised of a silicon rubber sheet and a multiple rows of metal filaments. The metal filaments (wires) are provided in the vertical direction of Figure 13, i.e., orthogonal to the horizontal sheet of the conductive elastomer 250. An example of pitch between the metal filaments is 0.05mm or less and thickness of the silicon rubber sheet is about

0.2mm. Such a conductive elastomer is produced by Shin-Etsu Polymer Co. Ltd, Japan, and available in the market.

Figure 14 is a cross sectional view showing details of contact structure of the present invention incorporated in the probe contact assembly of Figures 12 and 13. The contactor 30 having the cantilever spring is attached to the contact substrate 20 in a manner that the middle portion of the contactor 30 is inserted in a through hole 25. The contact portion 35 at the lower end of the straight middle portion is inserted in the through hole 25. In this example, the contact substrate 20 is a multi-layered substrate having three standard silicon wafers 22₁, 22₂, and 22₃, which are stacked and fusion bonded to one another. An example of thickness of each of the silicon wafers 22₁-22₃, is about 0.5mm. The based portion 33 of the contactor 30 having the cantilever shape spring is projected from the upper surface of the contact substrate 20. The contactor 30 has a flange like portion (jaw) 34 to be fitted with an upper surface of the contact substrate 20 close to the through hole 25. A contact point 35 at the tip of the contactor 30 is preferably sharpened to promote the scrubbing effect on the surface of the contact target.

The process of forming three layered substrate 20 and through holes thereon shown in Figure 14 is briefly explained in the following. First, the second wafer 22₂ and the third wafer 22₃ are directly bonded through, for example, silicon fusion bonding. Then the wafers 22₂ and 22₃ are polished both front and back, and through holes are created therethrough by an etching process. Such a deep trench etching is achieved, for example, by reactive ion etching using a reactive gas plasma. The size of the through holes on the second and third wafers 22₂ and 22₃ may be smaller than the flange like portion 34 of the contactor 30 when it is necessary to form steps in the through holes for the purpose of mounting the contactors 30.

Then, the first wafer 22₁ is polished its front and back surfaces and through holes 25 are created in the first wafer 22₁ by the deep trench etching noted above. The first wafer 22₁ is aligned and fusion bonded to the
5 second and third wafers 22₂ and 22₃. For insulation, silicon oxide layers of, for example, at least one micrometer is preferably grown on all of the exposed surfaces of the contact substrate produced in this manner.

10 Figure 15 is a perspective view showing an example of contact structure blocks (contact substrates) of the present invention each having a large number of contactors 30 produced through the process shown in Figures 6A and 6B. This example shows a plurality of
15 contact substrates or contact structure blocks 20 to be assembled with one another to build a contact structure of desired size and desired number of contactors. In Figure 15, although each contact structure block includes contactors 30 assembled in a single line, a contact
20 structure block of the present invention may include contactors aligned in two or more lines, i.e., a matrix manner.

As noted above, one of the features of the present invention is the capability of combining a plurality of
25 contact structure blocks 20 to create a contact structure (probe contact assembly) of increased overall size and number of contactors. In the example of Figure 15, four contact structure blocks 20 are prepared to be connected to one another. Although not shown in the example of
30 Figure 15, but shown in Figure 16, each contact structure block 20 has a connection (engagement) mechanism such as teeth and recesses at the outer edges thereof.

Figure 16 is a perspective view of the contact structure formed by a plurality of contact structure
35 blocks 20 of the present invention. In this example, five contact substrates are connected with one another to create a contact structure having an overall size which

is an integer multiple of the size of the contact structure block. For simplicity of illustration, the contactors are not shown on the contact substrates (wafers) 22. By combining the contact substrates 22 in this manner, a contact assembly of desired size such as equivalent to the size of a twelve-inch semiconductor wafer can be established.

In this example, the right and left edges of the contact substrate are provided with engagement teeth 55 and recesses 65. The size of the tooth 55 and the size of the recess 65 are the same in the right and left edges, however, the position of the tooth 55 and recess 65 is shifted by one unit. Thus, the left edge of one contact substrate 22 fits with the right edge of the another contact substrate 22. Although not shown in Figure 16, a projection is provided at a distal end of the contact substrate 22 to fit in a groove 70 at a proximal end of another contact substrate 22. Instead of using the projections and grooves, it is also possible to use the teeth and recesses such as in the right and left edges described above. The contactors 30 will be mounted on the contact substrates 22 in the manner shown in Figures 16 in through holes 25.

According to the present invention, the contact structure has a very high frequency bandwidth to meet the test requirements of next generation semiconductor technology. Since the large number of contactors are produced at the same time on the substrate without involving manual handling, it is possible to achieve consistent quality, high reliability and long life in the contact performance. Further, because the contactors are assembled on the same substrate material as that of the device under test, it is possible to compensate positional errors caused by temperature changes. Further, it is possible to produce a large number of contactors in a horizontal direction on the silicon substrate by using relatively simple technique. The

contact structure produced by the present invention is low cost and high efficiency and has high mechanical strength and reliability. The contact structure produced by the method of the present invention are advantageously applied in testing a semiconductor wafer, packaged LSI, multi-chip module and the like including burn-in testing.

Although only a preferred embodiment is specifically illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated that many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings and within the purview of the appended claims without departing the spirit and intended scope of the invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets, comprising:
 - a contact substrate having through holes running through upper and lower surfaces thereof; and
 - a plurality of contactors each being uniformly made of same conductive material throughout and mounted vertically on the contact substrate where each of the contactors is comprised of an intermediate portion which is comprised of an intermediate portion which is substantially straight and is inserted in the through hole provided on the contact substrate in a vertical direction, a contact portion integral to the intermediate portion and positioned at one end of the contactor to function as a contact point, and a base portion provided at another end of the contactor, and a spring portion upwardly inclined relative to the surface of the contact substrate and provide between the base portion and the intermediate portion;wherein the spring portion has a straight beam shape and exerts a resilient contact force when the contactor is pressed against the contact target, and a part of the intermediate portion is indented to reduce its width or thickness for promoting flexibility of the contactor.
2. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 1, wherein the contact substrate is formed of a single or a plurality of semiconductor substrates bonded to one another.
3. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 1, wherein each of the contactors is provided with a projection at the intermediate portion thereof to be fitted with the contact substrate.
4. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 1, wherein the contact

substrate is formed of first and second semiconductor wafers which are bonded to one another on which through holes are provided for mounting the contactors therethrough.

5. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 1, wherein the contactors are formed on a planar surface of a dielectric substrate in a horizontal direction and removed from the dielectric substrate and mounted on the contact substrate in a vertical direction.

6. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 1, wherein the contact substrate has an engagement mechanism at outer edges thereof for connecting other contact substrates at the outer edges in a side-by-side fashion to create a contactor assembly of arbitrary size and arbitrary number of contactors.

7. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 6, wherein the engagement mechanism includes teeth and recesses provided at the outer edges of the contact substrate in such a way that the engagement teeth and recesses in one outer edge fit with the engagement teeth and recesses in an opposite outer edge of other contact substrate, thereby assembling a plurality of contact substrates to establish the contactor assembly of desired size, shape and number of contactors.

8. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 1, wherein the contact substrate is made of silicon, ceramic or glass.

9. A contact structure for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 1, wherein the contact substrate is made of dielectric material.

10. A method for producing a contact structure, comprising the following steps of:

- (a) forming a sacrificial layer on a surface of a silicon substrate;

- (b) forming a photoresist layer on the sacrificial layer;
- (c) aligning a photo mask over the photoresist layer and exposing the photoresist layer with ultraviolet light through the photo mask, the photo mask including an image of the contactors;
- (d) developing patterns of the image of the contactors on a surface of the photoresist layer;
- (e) forming the contactors made of conductive material in the patterns on the photoresist layer by depositing the conductive material, each of the contactors having an intermediate portion which is substantially straight where a part of the intermediate portion is indented to reduce its width or thickness for promoting flexibility of the contactor, a contact portion integral with the intermediate portion and positioned at one end of the contactor, a base portion provided at another end of the contactor, and a spring portion having a straight shape and upwardly inclined toward the another end and formed between the base portion and the intermediate portion;
- (f) stripping the photoresist layer off;
- (g) removing the sacrificial layer by an etching process so that the contactors are separated from the silicon substrate; and
- (h) mounting the contactors on a contact substrate having through holes to receive ends of the contactors therein so that at least one end of each of the contactors functions as a contact pad for electric connection.

11. A method for producing a contact structure as defined in Claim 10, after forming the contactors by depositing the conductive material in the step (e), the method further comprising a step of placing an adhesive tape on the contactors

so that upper surfaces of the contactors are attached to the adhesive tape.

12. A method for producing a contact structure, comprising the following steps of:

- (a) forming an conductive substrate made of electric conductive material on a dielectric substrate;
- (b) forming a photoresist layer on the conductive substrate;
- (c) aligning a photo mask over the photoresist layer and exposing the photoresist layer with ultraviolet light through the photo mask, the photo mask including an image of the contactors;
- (d) developing patterns of the image of the contactors on a surface of the photoresist layer;
- (e) forming the contactors made of conductive material in the patterns on the photoresist layer by depositing the conductive material, each of the contactors having an intermediate portion which is substantially straight where a part of the intermediate portion is indented to reduce its width or thickness for promoting flexibility of the contactor, a contact portion integral with the intermediate portion and positioned at one end of the contactor, a base portion provided at having a straight shape and upwardly inclined toward the another end and formed between the base portion and the intermediate portion;
- (f) stripping off the photoresist layer;
- (g) peeling the conductive substrate having contactors thereon from the dielectric substrate;
- (h) placing an adhesive tape on the contactors on the conductive substrate so that upper surfaces of the contactors adhere to the adhesive tape wherein adhesive strength between the contactors and the

adhesive tape is larger than that between the contactors and the conductive substrate;

(i) peeling the conductive substrate so that the contactors on the adhesive tape are separated from the conductive substrate; and

(j) mounting the contract on a contact substrate by inserting the contactor in through holes provided on the contact substrate.

13. A probe contact assembly for establishing electrical connection with contact targets, comprising:

a contact substrate having a plurality of contactors mounted thereon;

a probe card for mounting the contact substrate and establishing electrical communication between the contactors and electrodes provided on the probe card; and

a pin block having a plurality of contact pins to interface between the probe card and a semiconductor test system when the pin block is attached to the probe card;

wherein the contactors are uniformly made of same conductive material throughout and are mounted vertically on the contact substrate where each of the contactors has an intermediate portion which is substantially straight and is inserted in the through hole provided on the contact substrate in a vertical direction, a contact portion integral to the intermediate portion and positioned at one end of the contactor to function as a contact point, and a base portion provided at another end of the contactor, and a spring portion upwardly inclined relative to the surface of the contact substrate and provided between the base portion and the intermediate portion;

wherein the spring portion has a straight beam shape and exerts a resilient contact force when the contactor is pressed against the contact target, and a part of the

intermediate portion is indented to reduce its width or thickness for promoting flexibility of the contactor.

14. A probe contact assembly for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 13, wherein the contact substrate is formed of a single or a plurality of semiconductor wafers bonded to one another.

15. A probe contact assembly for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 13, wherein each of the contactors is provided with a projection at the intermediate portion thereof to be fitted with the contact substrate.

16. A probe contact assembly for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 13, wherein the contact substrate is formed of three layers of semiconductor wafers which are bonded to one another on which through holes are provided for mounting the contactors therethrough.

17. A probe contact assembly for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 13, wherein the contactors are formed on a planer surface of a dielectric substrate in a horizontal direction and removed from the dielectric substrate and mounted on the contact substrate in a vertical direction.

18. A probe contact assembly for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 13, wherein the contact substrate has an engagement mechanism at outer edges thereof for connecting other contact substrates at any desired edges in a side-by-side fashion to create a contactor assembly of arbitrary size.

19. A probe contact assembly for establishing electrical connection with contact targets as defined in Claim 18, therein the engagement mechanism includes teeth and recesses provided at the outer edges of the contact substrate in such a way that the engagement teeth and recesses in one outer edge fit with the engagement teeth and recesses in an opposite outer edge of other

contact substrate, thereby assembling a plurality of contact substrates to establish the contactor assembly of desired size, shape and number of contactors.