

HIGH PRESSURE STEAM ANNEAL PROCESSING APPARATUS

BACKGROUND

Field

[0001] Embodiments of the disclosure generally relate to fabrication of integrated circuits and particularly to an apparatus for annealing one or more semiconductor substrates.

Description of the Related Art

[0002] Formation of a semiconductor device, such as memory devices, logic devices, microprocessors, or the like, involves deposition of one or more films over a semiconductor substrate. The films are used to create the circuitry required to manufacture the semiconductor device. Annealing is a heat treatment process used to achieve various effects on the deposited films to improve their electrical properties. For example, annealing can be used to activate dopants, densify the deposited films, or change states of grown films.

[0003] Semiconductor device geometries have dramatically decreased in size since introduction several decades ago. Increasing device densities have resulted in structural features having decreased spatial dimensions. For example, in high aspect ratio (ratio of depth to width) gaps and trenches, the structural features of modern semiconductor devices have narrowed to a point where filling the gap with material has become extremely challenging, particularly in that the properties of material filling the gap cannot be reliably controlled. Conventional annealing processes suitable for improving properties of bulk deposited materials have not demonstrated an ability to improve properties of materials deposited in high aspect ratio features.

[0004] Thus, there is a need for an improved method and apparatus for annealing semiconductor substrates.

SUMMARY

[0005] Embodiments of the disclosure generally relate to an apparatus for annealing one or more semiconductor substrates. In one embodiment, a batch processing chamber is disclosed. The batch processing chamber includes a

chamber body enclosing an internal volume, a cassette moveably disposed within the internal volume, and a plug coupled to a bottom wall of the cassette. The chamber body has an opening through a bottom wall of the chamber body. A shaft is disposed through the opening formed in the chamber body and coupled to the cassette. The chamber body is interfaced with one or more heaters operable to maintain the chamber body at a temperature of greater than 290°C. The cassette is configured to be raised to a first position to load a plurality of substrates thereon, and lowered into a second position beneath the first position for processing. The plug includes a downward-facing seal configured to engage with a top surface of the bottom wall of the chamber body when the cassette is in the second position. The seal circumscribes the opening and shaft, and seals against the bottom wall of the chamber body.

[0006] In another embodiment, a batch processing chamber includes a chamber body enclosing an internal volume, a cassette moveably disposed within the internal volume and a hollow cylindrical shell disposed within the internal volume. The chamber body is interfaced with one or more heaters operable to maintain the chamber body at a temperature of greater than 290°C. The cassette is movable between a first position and a second position beneath the first position. In the first position, the cassette is disposed above the shell. In the second position, the cassette is circumscribed by the shell. One or more heaters are disposed between an inner surface of the shell and the cassette.

[0007] In yet another embodiment, a batch processing chamber includes a chamber body enclosing an internal volume, a cassette moveably disposed within the internal volume, a plug coupled to a bottom wall of the cassette, a hollow cylindrical shell disposed within the internal volume, a lid disposed on the cassette and a door configured to sealably close a loading port formed through a sidewall of the chamber body. The chamber body includes one or more heaters operable to maintain the chamber body at a temperature of greater than 290°C. The cassette has one or more gas entry openings formed through a bottom wall thereof. The cassette is movable between a first position and a second position below the first position. In the first position, the cassette is disposed above the shell. In the second position, the cassette is laterally circumscribed by the shell. The plug is coupled to a shaft and includes a downward-facing seal that surrounds the opening and is

configured to engage with a top surface of the bottom wall of the chamber body when the cassette is in the second position. The plug also includes a cooling channel disposed within. The shell has one or more heaters disposed on an inner surface thereof. The lid has a diameter greater than an outer diameter of the shell.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] So that the manner in which the above recited features of the present disclosure can be understood in detail, a more particular description of the disclosure, briefly summarized above, may be had by reference to embodiments, some of which are illustrated in the appended drawings. It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only exemplary embodiments and are therefore not to be considered limiting of scope, as the disclosure may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

[0009] Figure 1A is a schematic sectional view of a batch processing chamber with a cassette in a raised position for loading a plurality of substrates into the cassette.

[0010] Figure 1B is a schematic sectional view of the batch processing chamber with the cassette in a lowered position for processing the plurality of substrates.

[0011] Figure 1C is a schematic bottom view of the cassette.

[0012] Figure 1D is a partial schematic sectional view of a cylindrical shell positioned within the batch processing chamber.

[0013] Figure 1E is a schematic sectional view of a slit valve door in an open configuration.

[0014] Figure 1F is a schematic sectional view of a slit valve door in a closed configuration.

[0015] Figure 2 is a schematic view of a temperature-controlled inlet fluid circuit connected to an inlet of the batch processing chamber.

[0016] Figure 3 is a schematic view of a temperature-controlled outlet fluid circuit connected to an outlet of the batch processing chamber.

[0017] To facilitate understanding, identical reference numerals have been used, where possible, to designate identical elements that are common to the figures. It is contemplated that elements and features of one embodiment may be beneficially incorporated in other embodiments without further recitation.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0018] Embodiments of the disclosure generally relate to methods and apparatuses for annealing one or more substrate, such as semiconductor substrates. In one example, an apparatus is a batch processing chamber that operates to process a plurality semiconductor substrates located on a cassette that is disposed within the batch processing chamber. The batch processing chamber anneals the substrates under a pressure of up to 70 bar and at a temperature of up to 550°C when the cassette is in a lowered, e.g., processing, position. In one example described herein, a bottom wall of the cassette includes a downwardly facing seal that closes the batch processing chamber when the cassette is in a lowered position. Thus at processing pressures above atmospheric pressure, a pressure differential across the cassette and a bottom interface forces the seal into compression, which advantageously creates a more robust seal as compared to dynamic seals typically used in shaft sealing applications. Similarly, a slit valve door of the batch processing chamber seals from the interior volume of the processing chamber, and likewise the seals of the slit valve door are forced into compression when the interior volume of the processing chamber is at an elevated pressure. In other embodiments, the batch processing chamber incorporates a hollow cylindrical shell. The shell functions to retain heat generated by one or more heaters disposed within the bounds of the shell and located between the shell and the cassette. The shell also substantially reduces the amount of heat transferred to sidewalls of the processing chamber.

[0019] Figure 1 is a schematic sectional view of a batch processing chamber 100 with a cassette 130 disposed in a first position, e.g., a raised position or a loading position, for loading a plurality of substrates 135 into the cassette 130. The batch processing chamber 100 has a chamber body 110 enclosing an internal volume 150, and a lid 111 disposed on the chamber body 110. The chamber body 110 has an

annular shape, though in other embodiments the body 110 may be rectangular or any closed shape.

[0020] The chamber body 110 may be fabricated in one or more sections. In the embodiment shown in Figure 1, the chamber body 110 includes lid 111 includes a bottom wall 115, a sidewall 117. The bottom wall 115 has an inner surface 151 and an outer surface 153. The sidewall 117 has an inner surface 155 and an outer surface 157. The lid 111 and the chamber body 110 are held together by a static seal 118. A cooling channel 119 is disposed adjacent to the static seal 118. In other embodiments (not shown), the chamber body 110 may include an upper spool and a lower spool positioned between the bottom 115 and the lid 111. The chamber body 110 may be fabricated from nickel-based steel alloys that exhibit high resistance to corrosion, such as but not limited to one or more Hastelloy®, Inconel®, and Monel® alloys.

[0021] One or more cartridge heaters 112 are disposed within the chamber body 110, for example, within a recess of the bottom 115 or the sidewall 117. The heaters 112 are configured to actively heat the chamber body 110 and maintain the chamber body 110 at a temperature of greater than 290°C. Each of the heaters 112 may be a resistive coil, a lamp, a ceramic heater, a graphite-based carbon fiber composite (CFC) heater, a stainless steel heater or an aluminum heater. The heaters 112 are powered by a power source 105. A temperature sensor 114 is coupled to the chamber body 110 and configured to monitor the temperature of the chamber body 110. Power to the heaters 112 is controlled by the controller 180 through feedback received from the temperature sensor 114. An optional insulating liner 116 made of a material having a low coefficient of heat transfer (at least relative to the shield), such as, but not limited to, quartz, may be disposed in the internal volume 150 along the inner surface 155 of the sidewall 117 of the chamber body 110. In such an example, the liner 116 is disposed between a shell 120 and the sidewall 117, advantageously reducing the amount of heat transferred between the shell 120 and the sidewall 117, thus assisting regulating the temperature of the sidewall 117.

[0022] The cassette 130 is moveably disposed within the internal volume 150. The cassette 130 may be fabricated from quartz, ceramic, or other thermally non-

conductive material. The cassette 130 houses a plurality of substrates 135 therein to facilitate transfer of the plurality of substrates 135 into and out of the batch processing chamber 100. Moreover, the cassette 130 facilitates transfer of substrates 135 between a first position within the batch processing chamber 100 and a second position within the batch processing chamber 100 such that the substrates 135 are annealed at an elevated pressure and an elevated temperature.

[0023] The cassette 130 includes a top wall 132, a bottom wall 134, and a sidewall 136. The sidewall 136 of the cassette 130 has a plurality of substrate storage slots 138 formed on an inward surface thereof. Each substrate storage slot 138 is evenly spaced vertically along the inner surface of the sidewall 136 of the cassette 130. Each substrate storage slot 138 is configured to hold one of the plurality of substrates 135 thereon. In one example, the cassette 130 may have as many as 25 substrate storage slots 138 for holding the substrates 135. In other examples, more or less than 25 substrate storage slots 138 are contemplated. The bottom wall 134 has one or more apertures 133 formed therethrough which facilitate fluid flow into the cassette 130.

[0024] Figure 1C is a schematic bottom view of the cassette 130. In one embodiment, as shown in Figure 1C, the bottom wall 134 of the cassette 130 includes one or more spokes 104 radially extending from a central portion 330 to an annular-shaped peripheral portion 131, defining the apertures 133 between adjacent spokes 104.

[0025] Returning to Figure 1A and Figure 1B, a plug 172 is coupled to the bottom wall 134 of the cassette 130. The plug 172 includes one or more seals 175. The seals may be disposed on a lower surface of the plug 172. The plug 172 is positioned vertically above an opening 154 formed through the bottom wall 115 of the chamber body 110. The plug 172 actuates vertically up and down with the cassette 130 during operation of the batch processing chamber 100. In some aspects, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, the opening 154 includes a stepped upper profile formed in the inner surface 151 and configured to accommodate the plug 172 therein. During operation, the plug 172 is actuated vertically downward and engages a bottom surface of the stepped profile of the opening 154 with the seal

175, thereby forming a seal between the plug 172 and the bottom wall 115 to prevent fluid flow through the opening 154 of the batch processing chamber 100.

[0026] When the plug engages the inner surface 151, the elevated pressure within the batch processing chamber 100, which is greater than the pressure outside of the batch processing chamber 100, forces the seal 175 into engagement with the inner surface 151. By forcing the seal 175 into engagement, a stronger and more fluid-tight seal is created. In one example, the seal 175 is made from a high-temperature polymer, such as but not limited to a perfluoroelastomer. In some embodiments, the seal 175 is an O-ring. In some embodiments, the plug 172 may be excluded. In such an example, the bottom wall 134 of the cassette 130 seals against the bottom 115. It is contemplated that in such an example, the seals 175 may be positioned on a lower surface of the bottom wall 134 of the cassette 134, or optionally, the seals 175 may be excluded.

[0027] The plug 172 also includes a cooling channel 176 disposed therein adjacent to the seal 175. The cooling channel 176 is fluidly connected to a cooling fluid source 177. A cooling fluid, such as but not limited to an inert, dielectric, and high-performance heat transfer fluid, may be circulated within the cooling channel 176. The cooling channel 176 is configured to cool the plug 172 and the seal 175 to maintain the seal 175 below a maximum integrity temperature (e.g., about 325°C) during operation, thereby prolonging the useful life of the seal 175. The plug 172 is coupled to a shaft 174 which moves the plug 172 and the cassette 130 up and down within the internal volume 150. The plug 172 is disposed at an upper end of the shaft 174, and may be a separate component of the shaft 174 or may be integrally formed therewith. A lower end of the shaft 174 is coupled to an actuator 170 which facilitates motion of the shaft 174. The shaft 174 and the actuator 170 are controlled by the controller 180.

[0028] The batch processing chamber 100 also includes a vacuum lip seal 160. The vacuum lip seal 160 is positioned adjacent the outer surface 153 of the bottom wall 115, between the outer surface 153 and the actuator 170. The vacuum lip seal 160 includes a seal 165 to facilitate sealing of the vacuum lip seal 160 around the shaft 174. The seal 165 may be made from a high-temperature polymer, such as but not limited to a perfluoroelastomer. The vacuum lip seal 160 functions as a

back-up or redundant seal to the seals 175. In the event of failure of the seal 175, pressurized fluid or air escaping from the internal volume 150 is directed through an outlet 169 which is fluidly connected to a pump (not shown). During low-pressure operation, as the shaft 174 moves the cassette 130 up and down within the internal volume 150 of the batch processing chamber 100, the vacuum lip seal 160 prevents leakage of pressurized processing fluid or air from the internal volume 150, or ingress of ambient air into the internal volume 150.

[0029] In some embodiments, as shown in Figures 1A and 1B, the batch processing chamber 100 also includes a thermal break 178. The thermal break is positioned adjacent an upper surface of the plug 172 and a lower surface of the bottom wall 134 of the cassette 130. The thermal break 178 may be adhered to the bottom wall 134, or to the upper surface of the plug 172. The thermal break 178 is fabricated from ceramic, however, other materials are also contemplated. The thermal break 178 is configured to restrict the flow of heat from the cassette 130 to outside the chamber by mitigating heat transfer between the cassette 130 and the shaft 174.

[0030] Figure 1D is a partial schematic sectional view of a cylindrical shell positioned within the batch processing chamber. The cylindrical shell 120 is positioned between the cassette 130 (when in the lowered position) and the optional insulating liner 116.

[0031] The shell 120 includes a wall 123 having a heater 127 coupled to an inner surface 106 thereof. The shell 120 is configured to heat a processing region 125 located within the wall 123, and to shield an outer region 129 outside the wall 123 from the heat in the processing region 125. Stated otherwise, the shell 120 facilitates thermal separation between the processing region 125 and the outer region 129. The wall 123 may be fabricated from a highly reflective sheet metal or a nickel-based steel alloy such as Hastelloy® alloy. An outer surface 107 of the wall 123 may optionally be coated with an insulating layer (not shown) to further facilitate thermal separation between the processing region 125 and the outer region 129.

[0032] The inner surface 106 of the wall 123 has a plurality of hooks 126, such as ceramic hooks, coupled thereto. The plurality of hooks 126 supports one or more

heaters 127 thereon. The heaters 127 are arranged in a helical or axially-aligned configured, and are configured to heat the processing region 125 and the plurality of substrates 135 placed therein during an annealing operation. In one example, the one or more heaters 127 are configured to heat the processing region 125 to a temperature of up to 550°C. The heaters may be for, example, resistive heaters, formed from nick-chromium alloy. The heaters 127 within the shell 120 are electrically connected to the power source 105. In one example, the inner surface 106 is thermally reflective and is configured to reflect heat generated by the heaters 127 back into the processing region 125. In some aspects, the inner surface 1 may include a reflective coating thereon to further enhance thermal reflection.

[0033] A pressure sensor 122 is positioned in the processing region 125 on an inner surface 151 of the bottom 115. The pressure sensor 122 is configured to measure the pressure of the processing region 125 during the annealing process. A temperature sensor 124 is positioned in the processing region 125 on the inner surface 151 of the bottom 115 adjacent the pressure sensor 122. and the temperature sensor 124 is configured to measure the temperature of the processing region 125 during the annealing process.

[0034] A lid 140 of the cassette 130 includes an annular recess 142 on a lower surface thereof. The annular recess 142 is configured to be disposed over the wall 123 of the shell 120, and form a gap 128 between the wall 123 and the lid 140. In one example, the lid 140 has a diameter greater than an outer diameter of the shell 120 to accommodate annular recess 142. When a processing fluid is introduced into the processing region 125, the gap 128 allows any residual air to be displaced by the processing fluid into the internal volume 150 (shown in Figure 1B).

[0035] Figure 1D also illustrates an example of the thermal break 178. In the illustrated example, the thermal break 178 is shaped as a capsulated cup. The capsulate cup minimizes contact with the bottom wall 134 of the cassette 130. As shown in Figure 1D, the thermal break 178 has a thin cylindrical wall 108 surrounding a hollow central portion 109. The hollow central portion 109 and the thin cylindrical wall reduce heat transfer between the cassette 130 and the plug 172. In another example, it is contemplated that the thermal break 178 may omit the

hollow central portion 109. In such an example, the thermal break 178 may be formed from a thermally insulating material.

[0036] Returning to Figures 1A and 1B, and with reference to Figures 1E and 1F, a loading port 158 is formed through the sidewall 117 of the chamber body 110. Figure 1E is a schematic sectional view of a slit valve door 195 in an open configuration. Figure 1F is a schematic sectional view of a slit valve 195 door in a closed configuration. During processing, a plurality of substrates 135 can be loaded into or unloaded from the batch processing chamber 100 through the loading port 158. A slit valve door 195 is used to provide access to the internal volume 150 through the loading port 158 by selectively opening and closing the loading port 158. The slit valve door 195 is configured to engage an inner surface 155 of the sidewall 117 surrounding the loading port 158. A seal 199 facilitates closure of the slit valve door 195 by sealing over the loading port 158. Elevated pressures within the internal volume 150 force the slit valve door 195 and the seal 199 into engagement with the inner surface 155, further. The seal 199 may be made from a high-temperature polymer, such as but not limited to a perfluoroelastomer. In some embodiments, the seal 199 may be an O-ring.

[0037] The slit valve door 195 includes a rotating pin 105a positioned in an elongated slot 105b. The pin 105a couples the slit valve door 195 to a bar 198a. The bar 198a is coupled to a horizontal actuator 194a and a vertical actuator 190. The horizontal actuator 194a is configured to linearly move one end of the slit valve door 195 within the internal volume 150 towards and away from the loading port 158. Upon actuation of the horizontal actuator 194a, the slit valve door 195 pivots about a pin 105c while the pin 105a moves within the elongated slot 105b. To provide clearance for rotation of the slit valve door 195, a second horizontal actuator 194b may facilitate movement of the slit valve door 195 away from the inner surface 155 via a bar 198b. The slit valve door 195 may be pivoted into a non-vertical orientation, such as about 45 degrees relative to the inner surface 155, to provide for ingress and egress of substrates. To provide additional clearance, the horizontal actuators 194a, 194b may be coupled to a bracket 196, which is coupled to the vertical actuator 190 by a link 192, to facilitate actuation of the bracket 196. Vertical actuation of the bracket 196 provides additional clearance within the loading port

158 by moving bars 198a, 198b vertically within the loading port 158. Motion of the slit valve door 195 and f respective actuators is controlled by the controller 180.

[0038] To facilitate airflow within the batch processing chamber 100, an inlet port 152 is formed through the bottom wall 115 of the chamber body 110 and fluidly connects an inlet conduit 259 (shown in Figure 2) to the internal volume 150. An outlet port 156 is also formed through the bottom wall 115 and connects the internal volume 150 to an outlet conduit 361 (shown in Figure 3). The inlet port 152 is fluidly coupled to a gas supply source to provide one or more gases (e.g., reagents, precursors, purge gas, or carrier gas).

[0039] Figure 2 schematically illustrates a temperature-controlled inlet fluid circuit 200. The temperature-controlled inlet fluid circuit 200 is fluidly connectable to the inlet port 152 via an inlet conduit 259. The inlet fluid circuit 200 includes a gas panel 250, a source conduit 257, and an inlet isolation valve 255 coupled to the inlet conduit 259. One or more heaters 252, 254, and 258 are interfaced with different portions of the inlet fluid circuit 200 to facilitate temperature control throughout the inlet fluid circuit 200. One or more temperature sensors 251, 253, and 256 are interfaced with different portions of the inlet fluid circuit 200 to obtain temperature measurements and provide the temperature measurement information to the controller 180, thereby facilitating feedback control.

[0040] As shown in Figure 2, the source conduit 257 is interfaced with and in thermal communication with the heater 252. The inlet isolation valve 255 is interfaced with and in thermal communication with the heater 254. The inlet conduit 259 is interfaced with and in thermal communication with the heater 258. The temperature sensor 251 is interfaced with the source conduit 257 and configured to measure the temperature of the source conduit 257. The temperature sensor 253 is interfaced with the inlet isolation valve 255 and configured to measure the temperature of the inlet isolation valve 255. The temperature sensor 256 is interfaced with the inlet conduit 259 and configured to measure the temperature of the inlet conduit 259. A temperature reading device 205 receives and displays the temperature measurements from the temperature sensors 251, 253 and 256. The temperature reading device 205 sends the temperature information to the controller 180 to facilitate temperature control of the inlet fluid circuit 200.

[0041] Figure 3 schematically illustrates a temperature-controlled outlet fluid circuit 300. The outlet fluid circuit 300 is fluidly connectable to the outlet port 156 via an outlet conduit 361. The outlet fluid circuit 300 includes an outlet isolation valve 365, an exhaust conduit 263, a condenser 360, and a pump 378. One or more heaters 362, 364, and 366 are interfaced with different portions of the outlet fluid circuit 300 to facilitate thermal control of the outlet fluid circuit 300. One or more temperature sensors 367, 368, and 369 are interfaced with different portions of the outlet fluid circuit 300 to obtain temperature measurements and provide the temperature measurement information to the controller 180. As shown in Figure 3, the outlet conduit 361 is interfaced with and in thermal communication with the heater 362. The outlet isolation valve 265 is interfaced with and in thermal communication with the heater 364. The exhaust conduit 363 is interfaced with and in thermal communication with the heater 366. The temperature sensor 367 is interfaced with the outlet conduit 361 and configured to measure the temperature of the outlet conduit 361. The temperature sensor 368 is interfaced with the outlet isolation valve 365 and configured to measure the temperature of the outlet isolation valve 365. The temperature sensor 369 is interfaced with the exhaust conduit 363 and configured to measure the temperature of the exhaust conduit 363. A temperature reading device 305 receives and displays the temperature measurements from the temperature sensors 367, 368 and 369. The temperature reading device 305 sends the temperature information to the controller 180 to facilitate temperature control of the outlet fluid circuit 300.

[0042] A condenser 360 is fluidly coupled to the internal volume 150 and configured to condense a processing fluid exiting the internal volume 150 through the outlet conduit 361. Optionally, the condensed processing fluid exiting the condenser 360 may be routed through a heat exchanger 370 via an isolation valve 375. The heat exchanger 370 is configured to further cool the condensed processing fluid so that the processing fluid may be more easily managed. The condenser 360 is fluidly connected to the isolation valve 375 by a condenser conduit 372. The heat exchanger 370 is coupled to the isolation valve 375 by a heat exchanger conduit 374. A pump 378 is fluidly connected to the heat exchanger 370 by a pump conduit 376 to facilitate pumping of the liquefied processing fluid from the heat exchanger 370 to a container (not shown) for recycling, reuse or disposal.

[0043] With reference to Figures 2 and 3, the heaters 252, 254, 258, 362, 364, and 366 are configured to maintain a processing fluid that is flowing through the fluid circuits 200 and 300 at a predetermined temperature. In one example, the predetermined temperature is greater than a condensation point of the processing fluid. The heaters 252, 254, 258, 362, 364, and 366 may be optionally covered with a layer of thermal insulation to prevent loss of heat into the outside environment, thereby improving temperature control efficiency of the fluid inlet circuit 200 and the fluid outlet circuit 300. The heaters 252, 254, 258, 362, 364, and 366 may be lamps, resistive heating elements, fluid conduits for flowing a heat transfer fluid, or other suitable heating devices. In the embodiments as shown in Figures 2 and 3, the heaters 252, 254, 258, 362, 364, and 366 are resistive heaters wound around the elements of the fluid circuits 200 and 300. The heaters 252, 254, 258, 362, 364, and 366 are individually coupled to the power source 105. In some embodiments, each of the heaters 252, 254, 258, 362, 364, and 366 may be independently controlled. The temperature sensors 251, 253, 256, 367, 368 and 369 may each be a non-contact sensor, such as an infrared sensor, or a contact sensor, such as a thermocouple.

[0044] The inlet isolation valve 255 and the outlet isolation valve 365 are shutoff valves. When the inlet isolation valve 255 is open, the outlet isolation valve 365 is closed such that a processing fluid flowing through source conduit 257 enters into the inlet conduit 259 and the processing region 125 within the internal volume 150. On the other hand, when the outlet isolation valve 365 is open, the inlet isolation valve 255 is closed such that a gaseous product is removed from the processing region 125 and flows through the outlet conduit 361 and the exhaust conduit 363 into the condenser 360.

[0045] It is contemplated that the processing fluid is selected according to the process requirements for the desired annealing of the substrates in the batch processing chamber 100. The processing fluid may comprise an oxygen-containing and/or nitrogen-containing gas, such as oxygen, steam, water, hydrogen peroxide, and/or ammonia. Alternatively or in addition to the oxygen-containing and/or nitrogen-containing gases, the processing fluid may contain a silicon-containing gas such as but not limited to one or more organosilicon compounds, one or more tetraalkyl orthosilicates, one or more disiloxanes, or any combination thereof. In

some embodiments, the processing fluid may be steam under a pressure of up to 70 bar and at a temperature of about 550°C.

[0046] Returning to Figures 1A and 1B, the batch processing chamber also includes a controller 180. The controller 180 controls the operation of the actuators 170, 194a, 194b, and 190, as well as the power source 105 of the batch processing chamber 100. The controller 180 is also connected to the cooling fluid source 177, the inlet fluid circuit 200 (Figure 2) and the outlet fluid circuit 300 (Figure 3). The controller 180 is communicatively connected to the pressure sensor 122 and the temperature sensors 114 and 124. The controller 180 includes a central processing unit (CPU) 182, a memory 184, and a support circuit 186. The CPU 182 may be any form of general purpose computer processor that may be used in an industrial setting. The memory 184 may be random access memory, read only memory, floppy, or hard disk drive, or other form of digital storage. The support circuit 186 is conventionally coupled to the CPU 182 and may include cache, clock circuits, input/output systems, power supplies, and/or the like.

[0047] The batch processing chamber 100 is configured for annealing a plurality of substrates 135 under a pressure of up to 70 bars and at a temperature of about 550°C. During operation, the heaters 112 are powered on to pre-heat the batch processing chamber 100 and maintain the internal volume 150 at a temperature of greater than 290°C to avoid condensation of a super-heated processing fluid subsequently introduced into the batch processing chamber 100.

[0048] The controller drives one or more actuators 190, 194a, 194b to open the loading port 158. Concurrently or after opening the loading port 158, the shaft 174 is actuated by the actuator 170 to raise the cassette 130 within the internal volume 150 of the batch processing chamber 100. The shaft 174 incrementally aligns each substrate storage slot 138 with the loading port 158 so that the plurality of substrates 135 from a robotic end effector (not shown) can be loaded individually on a respective substrate storage slot 138. Once the plurality of substrates 135 is loaded into the cassette 130, the loading port 158 is closed.

[0049] The shaft 174 is actuated by the actuator 170 to lower the cassette 130 within the internal volume 150 of the batch processing chamber 100. As the

cassette 130 settles into the lowered position, the plug 172 engages the inner surface 151 to seal the opening 154. At the same time, the lid 140 of the cassette 130 is disposed over the wall 123 of the shell 120, thus defining the processing region 125.

[0050] The heaters 127 positioned within the interior of the shell 120 are powered on by the power source 105 to maintain the processing region 125 and the plurality of substrates 135 at a temperature of about 550°C. A processing fluid in a super-heated state is introduced by the gas panel 250 into the processing region 125 through the inlet conduit 259 of the inlet fluid circuit 200. The outlet fluid circuit 300 is non-operational during introduction of fluid through the inlet conduit 259. As fluid is introduced into the processing region 125, the pressure at which the fluid is applied is increased incrementally. In one example, the fluid is steam which is introduced into the processing region 125 until a pressure of about 70 bar is established within the processing region 125. Once a desired pressure is established within the processing region, the flow of fluid is halted.

[0051] The plurality of substrates 135 is exposed to the processing fluid, e.g., steam, under high pressure and at a high temperature to anneal the plurality of substrates 135. During processing of the plurality of substrates 135, the processing region 125, the inlet conduit 259 and the outlet conduit 361 are maintained at a temperature and pressure such that the processing fluid stays in gaseous phase. For example, the temperatures of the processing region 125, the inlet conduit 259 and the outlet conduit 361 are maintained at a temperature greater than the condensation point of the processing fluid at the applied pressure. The processing region 125, the inlet conduit 259 and the outlet conduit 361 are maintained at a pressure less than the condensation pressure of the processing gas at the applied temperature. The controller 180 uses information from the temperature sensors 114 and 124, the temperature reading devices 205 and 305, and the pressure sensor 122 to control the flow of processing fluid, the applied pressure, and applied heat with respect to the batch processing chamber 100.

[0052] Once the annealing process is complete, the outlet fluid circuit 300 is activated to facilitate removal of the processing fluid from the processing region 125. The processing fluid exits the processing region through the outlet conduit 361 of the

outlet fluid circuit 300. The inlet fluid circuit 200 is non-operational during removal of processing gas from the processing region 125. The heater 127 is powered off after removal of the processing fluid from the processing region 125 to mitigate the formation of condensate within the processing region 125. The shaft 174 is then actuated by the actuator 170 to raise the cassette 130 within the internal volume 150 of the batch processing chamber 100. The loading port 158 is then opened via actuation of the slit valve door 195, and the substrates 135 are removed individually from the batch processing chamber 100.

[0053] In one aspect, the batch processing chamber 100 operates at a pressure less than 0.5 atm, when loading and unloading the plurality of substrates 135 to/from the cassette 130. During such low-pressure operation, the vacuum lip seal 160 is active as the shaft 174 moves the cassette 130 up and down within the internal volume 150. The vacuum lip seal 160 prevents the leakage of additional pressurized fluid or air into the internal volume 150 by sealing around the shaft 174. To facilitate leak mitigation, the vacuum lip seal is coupled to a vacuum pump (not shown) to withdraw fluid or air through an outlet 169. In one example, if the seal 175 fails, the vacuum lip seal 160 facilitates removal of any pressurized processing fluid through the outlet 169 such that the vacuum integrity of the batch processing chamber 100 can be maintained during the low-pressure operation.

[0054] The batch processing chamber described herein offers a number of benefits. The batch processing chamber is configured to operate under high pressure as well as under vacuum. The batch processing chamber incorporates a hollow cylindrical shell having a number of heaters disposed on the inner surface to heat a plurality of substrates up to 550°C during processing, such as annealing. At the same time, the shell acts as a heat shield to prevent the heat inside the shell from propagating to the chamber walls, allowing the temperature of the chamber walls to remain in a range from about 290°C to about 325°C. Maintaining the temperature of the chamber walls in a range from about 290°C to about 325°C enables the use of seals to close the ports to the chamber without temperature degradation of the seals. Without the use of such seals, metal seals would be needed. However, metal seals require permanent installation and have limited reuse capability. Additionally, metal seals have a tendency to generate unwanted particle contamination.

[0055] Additionally, the positioning of seals allows the use pressure to form a more robust seal. It is contemplated that the disclosed plug coupled and the slit valve door both benefit from such seal positioning.

[0056] Finally, the inlet fluid circuit and the outlet fluid circuit disclosed herein offer the advantage of controlling and maintaining the temperature of a processing fluid above the condensation point of the processing fluid flowing therethrough. A number of heaters and temperature sensors coupled to different portions of the inlet fluid circuit and outlet fluid circuit help the controller control and maintain the heat supply to the inlet fluid circuit, the outlet fluid circuit and the chamber. The additional temperature control provided by aspects disclosed herein prevents the condensation of the processing fluid and maintains the processing fluid in the gaseous phase, thereby improving overall processing of the substrate.

[0057] While the foregoing is directed to particular embodiments of the present disclosure, it is to be understood that these embodiments are merely illustrative of the principles and applications of the present disclosure. It is therefore to be understood that numerous modifications may be made to the illustrative embodiments to arrive at other embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the present inventions, as defined by the appended claims.

Claims

1. A batch processing chamber, comprising:
 - a chamber body enclosing an internal volume, the chamber body having an opening formed through a bottom wall thereof;
 - a slit valve door configured to sealably close a loading port formed through the chamber body, the slit valve door comprising seals which engage an inner surface of the chamber body;
 - a cassette moveably disposed within the internal volume, the cassette configured to be raised to a first position to load a plurality of substrates therein, and lowered into a second position beneath the first position for processing;
 - a shaft disposed through the opening formed in the chamber body and coupled to the cassette;
 - a plug coupled to a bottom wall of the cassette, the plug comprising a downward-facing seal configured to engage with a top surface of the bottom wall of the chamber body when the cassette is in the second position, the seal circumscribing the opening and the shaft, and sealable against the bottom wall of the chamber body when the cassette is in the second position; and
 - a heater disposed in a sidewall of the chamber body and operable to maintain the chamber body at a temperature of greater than 290°C.
2. The batch processing chamber of claim 1, further comprising a hollow cylindrical shell disposed within the internal volume and having one or more heaters disposed on an inner surface of the hollow cylindrical shell.
3. The batch processing chamber of claim 1, further comprising a lid disposed on the cassette, the lid having a diameter greater than an outer diameter of the hollow cylindrical shell.

4. The batch processing chamber of claim 1, wherein the bottom wall of the chamber body comprises a stepped opening to accommodate the plug.
5. The batch processing chamber of claim 1, further comprising a thermal break disposed between the bottom wall of the cassette and the plug.
6. The batch processing chamber of claim 1, further comprising a cooling channel disposed within the plug.
7. The batch processing chamber of claim 1, wherein the bottom wall of the cassette comprises openings configured to allow a fluid to pass therethrough.
8. A batch processing chamber, comprising:
 - a chamber body enclosing an internal volume;
 - a slit valve door configured to sealably close a loading port formed through the chamber body, the slit valve door comprising seals which engage an inner surface of the chamber body;
 - a cassette moveably disposed within the internal volume, the cassette movable between a first position and a second position beneath the first position;
 - a hollow cylindrical shell disposed within the internal volume and surrounding the cassette when the cassette is in the second position;
 - a heater disposed in a sidewall of the chamber body and operable to maintain the chamber body at a temperature of greater than 290°C; and
 - an additional heater disposed between an inner surface of the hollow cylindrical shell and the cassette when the cassette is in the second position.
9. The batch processing chamber of claim 8, further comprising:
 - a plug coupled to a bottom wall of the cassette and configured to move up and down within the internal volume, the plug comprising:
 - a downward-facing seal configured to engage with a top surface of a bottom wall of the chamber body.

10. The batch processing chamber of claim 8, further comprising a lid disposed on the cassette, the lid having a diameter greater than an outer diameter of the hollow cylindrical shell.
11. The batch processing chamber of claim 8, wherein a bottom wall of the cassette comprises openings formed therethrough to allow a fluid to pass therethrough.
12. The batch processing chamber of claim 8, wherein a bottom wall of the chamber body comprises a stepped opening to accommodate the plug.
13. The batch processing chamber of claim 8, further comprising a thermal break disposed between a bottom wall of the cassette and the plug.
14. The batch processing chamber of claim 8, further comprising a cooling channel disposed within the plug.
15. The batch processing chamber of claim 8, further comprising a thermal break disposed between the bottom wall of the cassette and the plug, the thermal break comprising a capsulated cup.
16. A batch processing chamber, comprising:
 - a chamber body enclosing an internal volume, the chamber body having an opening formed through a bottom wall thereof;
 - a slit valve door configured to sealably close a loading port formed through the chamber body, the slit valve door comprising seals which engage an inner surface of the chamber body;
 - a cassette moveably disposed within the internal volume, the cassette configured to be raised to a first position to load a plurality of substrates therein, and lowered into a second position beneath the first position for processing;

a plug coupled to a bottom wall of the cassette, the plug comprising a downward-facing seal configured to engage with a top surface of the bottom wall of the chamber body when the cassette is in the second position, the seal circumscribing the opening, and sealable against the bottom wall of the chamber body when the cassette is in the second position;

a heater disposed in a sidewall of the chamber body and operable to maintain the chamber body at a temperature of greater than 290°C; and

an additional heater disposed within the internal volume.

17. The batch processing chamber of claim 16, further comprising a shaft disposed through the opening formed in the chamber body and coupled to the cassette.

18. The batch processing chamber of claim 16, further comprising a hollow cylindrical shell disposed within the internal volume, wherein the additional heater is disposed on an inner surface of the hollow cylindrical shell.

19. The batch processing chamber of claim 16, further comprising a thermal break disposed between the bottom wall of the cassette and the plug.

20. The batch processing chamber of claim 16, further comprising a cooling channel disposed within the plug.