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Serial No.: 08/179,598
Filed: 01/05/94

LaRC
CIRCULAR ELECTRODE GEOMETRY
METAL-SEMICONDUCTOR-METAL PHOTODETECTORS

AWARDS ABSTRACT

High speed, metal-semiconductor-metal (MSM) photodetectors operating at speeds of 1 GHz and above have a wide range of uses in optoelectronic integrated circuits (OEICs). Of particular relevance is the application to optically based telecommunications systems. Current technology employs electrodes which are rectangular, interdigitated arrays.

Improved performance of these electrodes can be obtained with circular electrode geometries, rather than the traditional rectangular arrays. A high speed, metal-semiconductor-metal photodetector is formed which comprises a pair of generally circular, electrically conductive electrodes formed on an optically active semiconductor layer. Various embodiments of the invention include a spiral, intercoiled electrode geometry and an electrode geometry comprised of substantially circular, concentric electrodes which are interposed.

The novel aspect of the present invention is the generally circular geometry of the interdigitated electrode array. These electrode geometries result in photodetectors with lower capacitances, dark currents and lower inductance which reduces the ringing seen in the optical pulse response.

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Serial No.: 08/179,598
Filed: 01-05-94
Origin of the Invention

The invention described herein was jointly made by an employee of the United States Government, an employee of the College of William and Mary, an employee of the University of Virginia, and during the performance of work by an employee working under NASA Grant No. NAG-1-1434. In accordance with 35 U.S.C. 202, the contractor elected not to retain title.

Background of the Invention

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to photodetectors and more particularly to high speed metal-semiconductor-metal photodetectors with increased signal-to-noise ratios and data transmission rates for use in optoelectronic integrated circuits.

2. Description of the Related Art

High speed, metal-semiconductor-metal (MSM) photodetectors operating at speeds of 1 GHz and above have a wide range of uses in optoelectronic integrated circuits (OEICs). Of particular relevance is the application to optically based telecommunications systems. An
compared to the rectangular electrode array, as a result of the opposing
direction of current flow through the two arms of the spiral. This lowered
inductance results in a reduction of ringing seen in the optical pulse
response. The spiral geometry also results in lower capacitance and dark
current.

In an alternate embodiment illustrated in FIG. 3, lower capacitances
have been obtained when compared to conventional, rectangular
electrode arrays. In this embodiment, each electrode has a number of
substantially circular, concentric branches and the branches of each
electrode are interposed without contacting each other. The circular
electrodes are not fully closed, forming a split-ring structure, in order to
accommodate the interconnect structure for each electrode needed to
provide the proper bias potential and carry the signal current to an
external circuit.

Located within the concentric rings of the circular electrode
structure is a central disk. If this disk were absent, carriers generated in
the central region would encounter very low electric fields and be very
slowly transported to the innermost electrode. The result would be a
significant degradation of the response time. The split-ring type structure
for the electrodes is easiest to fabricate, however, other embodiments,
such as closed rings with a multilayer dielectric isolation containing via
holes for the interconnect structure, as illustrated in FIG. 4, are possible.

Although MSM photodetectors are typically fabricated using
materials such as GaAs or InGaAs as the optically active semiconductor
material, any other material can be used on which can be formed
patterned electrodes that exhibit rectifying behavior (i.e., Schottky
contacts) or non-rectifying behavior (i.e., ohmic contacts) and which
absorb light in a desired wavelength. Such materials may include Si, SiC,
AlGaAs, AlN, GaN, AlGaN, BN, ZnSe and HgCdTe. In like manner, any
contacts or ohmic contacts with the semiconductor layer may be used for the electrodes. Some typical metalization schemes which are commonly used include Ti/Au, Ti/Pt/Au, Al, Cr/Au, Ni/Au, Pt/Au, W/Au and Ag.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a plan view of a conventional, rectangular array of interdigitated electrodes;

FIG. 2 is a plan view of a photodetector according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a plan view of a second embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4(a) is a plan view of a third embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4(b) is a cross-sectional view of the embodiment shown in FIG. 4(a), taken along the line a-a’.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Referring now to FIG. 2, the preferred embodiment of a photodetector 30 according to the present invention is shown. This device consists two spiral electrodes 40 and 42 disposed on the surface of a layer of optically active semiconductor material 50. Any material can be used for the semiconductor on which can be formed patterned electrodes that exhibit rectifying behavior (i.e., Schottky contacts) or non-rectifying behavior (i.e., ohmic contacts) and which absorb light in a desired wavelength. Such materials may include GaAs, InGaAs, Si, SiC, AlGaAs, AlN, GaN, AlGaN, BN, ZnSe and HgCdTe. The electrodes can
be any electrically conductive material which can be formed into patterned electrodes and which are capable of forming Schottky contacts or ohmic contacts with the semiconductor material. Typical metalization schemes which are commonly used for electrodes include Ti/Au, Ti/Pt/Au, Al, Cr/Au, Ni/Au, Pt/Au/ W/Au and Ag.

For convenience of illustration, the semiconductor layer is represented as a rectangular area slightly larger than the area covered by the electrode pattern. It is understood by those of ordinary skill in the art, however, that the semiconductor layer can actually be much larger than the area covered by the electrode pattern. The only limitation on the size of the semiconductor layer is that the semiconductor layer can not have an area that is less than that spanned by the electrode pattern. This semiconductor layer can be a simple active layer, as depicted in the enclosed figures, or any of a number of appropriate heterostructures that are well known in the art.

These spiral electrodes 40 and 42 turn in the same direction and are parallel to each other for the entire length of the spiral, resulting in interpositioning of one spiral electrode within the spiral of the other electrode. The space between spiral electrodes is maintained essentially constant and the two electrodes are not in contact with each other at any point along their length. The end of each electrode that extends beyond the spiral connects to a bonding pad 44 or other device as part of a circuit or more complicated optoelectronic system. Any suitable external voltage source (not shown) may be used to bias the electrodes.

In the alternate embodiment shown in FIG. 3, a first electrode 60 is disposed on the surface of an optically active semiconductor material 50 and is comprised of a first element 65 which intersects a plurality of substantially circular second elements 66 and 67. The area of the semiconductor and the semiconductor material may vary as discussed in reference to FIG. 2, above. Each of these circular elements 66 and 67
are concentric with respect to each other and are open at a point
approximately 180 degrees from the point of intersection with the first
element of the first electrode 65, creating the appearance of split rings.
The first element 65 is connected to a central disk 68 which is located at
the approximate center of the concentric circular elements 66 and 67.

A second electrode 70 is also disposed on the surface of the
semiconductor layer 50 and has a first element 75 that is similar to
element 65 of the first electrode 60. This element 75 lies within the
openings created by the split rings in the concentric second elements of
the first electrode 66 and 67. A plurality of substantially circular second
elements 76 and 77 intersect the first element 75. These second
elements 76 and 77 are essentially concentric with the second elements
of the first electrode 66 and 67 and are disposed such that the second
elements of the second electrode 76 and 77 alternate with the second
elements of the first electrode 66 and 67. These second elements of the
second electrode 76 and 77 are also split where they would otherwise
intersect the first element of the first electrode 65. The split ends of
these second 76 and 77 elements terminate at a space apart from the
first element of the first electrode 65. Unlike the first electrode 60, the
first element of the second electrode 75 terminates at an intersecting
second element 77 rather than at a circular disk.

Any material can be used for the semiconductor on which can be
formed patterned electrodes that exhibit rectifying behavior (i.e., Schottky
contacts) or non-rectifying behavior (i.e., ohmic contacts) and which
absorb light in a desired wavelength. Such materials may include GaAs,
InGaAs, Si, SiC, AlGaAs, AlN, GaN, AlGaN, BN, ZnSe and HgCdTe. The
electrodes can be any electrically conductive material which can be
formed into patterned electrodes and which are capable of forming
Schottky contacts or ohmic contacts with the semiconductor material.
Typical metalization schemes which are commonly used for electrodes include Ti/Au, Ti/Pt/Au, Al, Cr/Au, Ni/Au, Pt/Au, W/Au and Ag.

In the alternate embodiment illustrated in FIGS. 4(a) and 4(b), a first electrode 80 is comprised of a first element 85 which is connected to a plurality of substantially circular second elements 86 and 87. The second elements 86 and 87 are disposed on an optically active semiconductor layer 50. Each of these second elements 86 and 87 are closed circles and concentric with each other.

A second electrode 90 is comprised of a first element 95 which is connected to a plurality of substantially circular second elements 96 and 97. The second elements 96 and 97 are disposed on an optically active semiconductor layer 50. Each of these second elements 96 and 97 are closed circles and concentric with each other and with the second elements of the first electrode 86 and 87.

A layer of suitable dielectric isolation material 100, such as SiO2, is disposed on the semiconductor surface to a thickness sufficient to completely cover the second elements of the first electrode 86 and 87 and the second elements of the second electrode 96 and 97 and to provide adequate insulative properties. The first element of the first electrode 85 lies on the surface of the isolation layer 100 and connects to each of the second elements of the first electrode 86 and 87 through small holes 102 and 104 positioned above the second elements 86 and 87 and extending through the isolation layer 100. The first element of the second electrode 95 also lies on the surface of the isolation layer 100 and connects to each of the second elements of the second electrode 96 and 97 through small holes 106 and 108 positioned above the second elements 96 and 97 and extending through the isolation layer 100. In addition to dielectric isolation schemes, it is possible to substitute an air bridge for the isolation material.
Any material can be used for the semiconductor on which can be formed patterned electrodes that exhibit rectifying behavior (i.e., Schottky contacts) or non-rectifying behavior (i.e., ohmic contacts) and which absorb light in a desired wavelength. Such materials may include GaAs, InGaAs, Si, SiC, AlGaAs, AlN, GaN, AlGaN, BN, ZnSe and HgCdTe. The electrodes can be any electrically conductive material which can be formed into patterned electrodes and which are capable of forming Schottky contacts or ohmic contacts with the semiconductor material. Typical metalization schemes which are commonly used for electrodes include Ti/Au, Ti/Pt/Au, Al, Cr/Au, Ni/Au, Pt/Au/ W/Au and Ag.

Many modifications, improvements and substitutions will be apparent to one skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention as described herein and defined in the following claims.

What is claimed is:
Abstract

The invention comprises a high speed, metal-semiconductor-metal photodetector which comprises a pair of generally circular, electrically conductive electrodes formed on an optically active semiconductor layer. Various embodiments of the invention include a spiral, intercoiled electrode geometry and an electrode geometry comprised of substantially circular, concentric electrodes which are interposed. These electrode geometries result in photodetectors with lower capacitances, dark currents and lower inductance which reduces the ringing seen in the optical pulse response.
FIG. 2
FIG. 3