HIGH QUALITY OPTICALLY POLISHED ALUMINUM MIRROR AND PROCESS FOR PRODUCING

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Abstract

A new technical advancement in the field of precision aluminum optics permits high quality optical polishing of aluminum monolith, which, in the field of optics, offers numerous benefits because of its machinability, lightweight, and low cost. This invention combines diamond turning and conventional polishing along with ink, a newly adopted material, for the polishing to accomplish a significant improvement in surface precision of aluminum monolith for optical purposes. This invention guarantees the precise optical polishing of typical bare aluminum monolith to surface roughness of less than about 30 angstroms rms and preferably about 5 angstroms rms while maintaining a surface figure accuracy in terms of surface figure error of not more than one-fifteenth of wave peak-to-valley.
Fig. 1
FORM BEVEL ON EDGE OF SURFACE OF ALUMINUM MONOLITH TO BE POLISHED

PRE-POLISH ALUMINUM MONOLITH

INSPECT ALUMINUM MONOLITH

ARE PRE-POLISHING REQUIREMENTS MET?

COAT POLISHER WITH POLISHING AGENT

PLACE ALUMINUM MONOLITH ON POLISHER

OPERATE POLISHING TOOL ASSEMBLY FOR PREDETERMINED DURATION

CLEAN ALUMINUM MONOLITH AND POLISHER

INSPECT ALUMINUM MONOLITH

ARE POLISHING REQUIREMENTS MET?

POLISHING COMPLETE
FORM BEVEL ON EDGE OF SURFACE OF ALUMINUM MONOLITH TO BE POLISHED

PRE-POLISH ALUMINUM MONOLITH

INSPECT ALUMINUM MONOLITH

ARE PRE-POLISHING REQUIREMENTS MET?

COAT POLISHER WITH POLISHING AGENT

SPRINKLE DIAMOND PARTICLES ON POLISHER

PLACE ALUMINUM MONOLITH ON POLISHER

OPERATE POLISHING TOOL ASSEMBLY FOR PREDETERMINED DURATION

CLEAN ALUMINUM MONOLITH AND POLISHER

COAT POLISHER WITH POLISHING AGENT

PLACE ALUMINUM MONOLITH ON POLISHER

OPERATE POLISHING TOOL ASSEMBLY

CLEAN ALUMINUM MONOLITH AND POLISHER

INSPECT ALUMINUM MONOLITH

ARE POLISHING REQUIREMENTS MET?

POLISHING COMPLETE

FIG. 3
ALUMINUM MATERIALS MAY ALSO BE USED FOR MIRRORS AS ALUMINUM OFFERS NUMEROUS BENEFITS BECAUSE OF ITS MACHINABILITY, LIGHTWEIGHT, AND LOW COST.

DUE TO LIGHT SCATTERING, WHICH RESULTS FROM POORLY POLISHED SURFACES, HOWEVER, BARE ALUMINUM CANNOT BE READILY IMPLEMENTED AS AN ACCEPTABLE MIRROR MATERIAL FOR UV, IR, AND VISIBLE APPLICATIONS. THE SCATTERING LOWERS THE SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO AND THROUGHPUT.

EXISTING TECHNOLOGY ATTEMPTS TO REMEDY THIS DILEMMA BY ELECTRO-PLATING A THIN LAYER OF ELECTROLESS NICKEL TO THE COMPLETE COMPONENT SURFACE AND THEN OPTICALLY POLISHING THE PLATED NICKEL. THE RESULT CREATES A TRADEOFF WHEREBY SURFACE ROUGHNESS IS DECREASED WHILE THERMAL AND MECHANICAL STABILITY OF THE OPTIC ARE SEVERELY COMPROMISED AT ALL BUT ROOM TEMPERATURES. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE FOR ALUMINUM OPTICS THAT HAVE BEEN LIGHT-WEIGHTED. FURTHER COMPLICATING MATTERS IS THE FACT THAT THE MOUNT IS USUALLY AN INTEGRALLY MACHINED PART OF AN ALUMINUM OPTIC. WHILE THESE CHARACTERISTICS ARE GREAT FOR DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND CASE OF DESIGN, THEY CREATE HAVOC ON THE OPTICAL PERFORMANCE ONCE ALL SURFACES ARE EVENLY PLATED WITH NICKEL.

THE ELECTROLESS NICKEL PLATINGS ALSO CAN CAUSE BIMETALLIC STRESSES TO DETERIORATE OPTICAL PERFORMANCE. ANOTHER PROBLEM OF PLATING ALUMINUM WITH ELECTROLESS NICKEL IS THAT MANUFACTURING COSTS GROW BECAUSE NICKEL POLISHES MORE SLOWLY THAN CONVENTIONAL OPTICAL MATERIALS.

ELECTRO-PLATING A THINK LAYER OF ELECTROLESS NICKEL TO THE ENTIRE COMPONENT SURFACE AND THEN OPTICALLY POLISHING THE PLATED NICKEL. THE RESULT CREATES A TRADEOFF WHEREBY SURFACE ROUGHNESS IS DECREASED WHILE THERMAL AND MECHANICAL STABILITY OF THE OPTIC ARE SEVERELY COMPROMISED AT ALL BUT ROOM TEMPERATURES. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE FOR ALUMINUM OPTICS THAT HAVE BEEN LIGHT-WEIGHTED. FURTHER COMPLICATING MATTERS IS THE FACT THAT THE MOUNT IS USUALLY AN INTEGRALLY MACHINED PART OF AN ALUMINUM OPTIC. WHILE THESE CHARACTERISTICS ARE GREAT FOR DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND CASE OF DESIGN, THEY CREATE HAVOC ON THE OPTICAL PERFORMANCE ONCE ALL SURFACES ARE EVENLY PLATED WITH NICKEL. THE ELECTROLESS NICKEL PLATINGS ALSO CAN CAUSE BIMETALLIC STRESSES TO DETERIORATE OPTICAL PERFORMANCE. ANOTHER PROBLEM OF PLATING ALUMINUM WITH ELECTROLESS NICKEL IS THAT MANUFACTURING COSTS GROW BECAUSE NICKEL POLISHES MORE SLOWLY THAN CONVENTIONAL OPTICAL MATERIALS.

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FIG. 3 is a flow chart of another preferred process for producing high quality optically polished surface on an aluminum monolith according to the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

This present invention provides an aluminum mirror of less than about 30 angstroms rms and preferably about 5 angstroms rms surface roughness with surface accuracy in terms of surface figure error as low as one-fifteenth of a wave peak-to-valley. The inventors used commercial grade aluminum, for example, 6061-T6 aluminum, to produce the aluminum mirror presented by this invention. Inventors believe that further polishing of the aluminum mirror mentioned above with the polishing process proposed by this invention can produce an aluminum mirror of higher quality.

The polishing process proposed by this invention can be applied to other optically feasible substrates including glass, nickel, stainless steel, and many other glasses or metal materials.

Referring to FIG. 1, the polishing operation is performed by the precise assembly of components to create a polishing tool assembly 100. A select grade of pitch used exclusively for optical fabrication is melted and poured on a cast iron lap 8. The pitch is allowed to cool and then shaped and grooved according to the optician's discretion. The pitch fabricated in this manner is referred to as a polisher 6. Once complete, the polisher 6 is installed on the machine spindle 10. The optician then applies the appropriate amount of a polishing agent to the surface of the polisher 6, and places the aluminum monolith 4 onto the polisher 6.

In one embodiment as shown in FIG. 2, one of the steps of this innovative polishing method is pre-polishing (Step 210) to produce a pre-polished surface having a surface roughness of not more than about 100 angstroms rms with a surface accuracy in terms of surface figure error of not more than about one-half of a wave peak-to-valley.

The pre-polishing of the surface of the metallic monolith may be affected by diamond turning. The process of diamond turning is a precision method of producing accurate mirrored surfaces of optical quality (for some wavelengths) on bare aluminum and other materials. It is successful because the turning or cutting action of the sharp diamond tool serves to peel thin layers of aluminum from the surfaces at such small portions so as to produce a polished finish whereby other machining processes actually tear the material away from the substrate. The amount of material removed on the typical final cut is 0.0001 inch. The diamond turning process allows surface figure errors of approximately 0.5 of a wave peak-to-valley over components up to four inches in diameter and surface roughness of generally 100 angstroms. The precision degrades slightly as the size of the component grows beyond four inches.

A bevel 12 may be formed adjacent to the surface to be polished during the present polishing process. (Step 201) The bevel 12 may be formed by conventional optical polishing methods, e.g. grinding, sanding, brushing, polishing, etc. or by diamond turning. It is preferable to form the bevel 12 prior to the pre-polishing step (Step 210). However, the bevel 12 may be formed at any time during the pre-polishing step (Step 210) but prior to the polishing step. (Step 220) The surface of the bevel 12 may be flat but is preferably rounded. Width of the bevel 12 may vary depending on width of the optical surface to be polished, typically in the range of 0.25 to 0.070 inch.

The polishing process continues with applying an appropriate amount of a polishing agent to the surface of the polisher and placing the optical monolith onto the polisher 6. A polishing agent is applied to the surface of the polisher 6 of the polishing tool assembly 100 (Step 216). The polishing agent provides lubrication for the aluminum monolith to be polished. During the polishing operation (Step 220) of the polishing tool assembly 100, the polisher 6 should be maintained to be wet with the polishing agent.

The material used as a polishing agent is different from those of normal polishing materials. The polishing agent employed in the present invention comprises an aqueous dispersion of abrasive particles, a catalyst, and organic solvent. The best mode of this invention employs India ink as a polishing agent.

India ink is a solvent based black ink, which is being used in fields other than printing. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,383,472, which is a biology related invention, utilizes the India ink to handle biopsy tissue specimen.

Based on analysis conducted by the inventors, the India ink comprises carbon black, ammonium hydroxide, phenol, ethylene glycol and water, all of which provide suitable interactions between the polisher and the surfaces of bare aluminum monolith to produce high quality optical surface thereon. Thus, the polishing agent may be replaced with a mixture of carbon black, ammonium hydroxide, phenol, ethylene glycol and water, the mixing proportions of the materials are 7-8%, 1-2%, 0.2-1%, 1-2%, and 85-90% by weight, respectively, based on the total weight of the polishing agent.

The polishing process may be repeated with the polishing agent that is gradually diluted with water. The mixing proportions of the polishing agent and diluting water are 100-50% and 0-50% by weight, respectively, based on the total weight of the diluted polishing agent.

After the polishing operation (Step 220) and before the measuring operation (Step 224), which is to measure the surface of the metallic monolith for verifying whether predetermined values of surface roughness and surface accuracy have been obtained, the aluminum monolith must be cleaned (Step 224) to remove the polishing agent from the aluminum monolith and the polisher 6. This cleaning process (Step 224) removes any residue of the polishing agent that might degrade on the aluminum monolith and the polisher 6. The cleaning process (Step 224) involves water, a cleaning liquid comprising ammonia and water, paper towels, and solvent such as acetone, and is performed in the following sequence: (1) deactivating the polishing tool
assembly 100, (2) removing the aluminum monolith 6 from the polishing tool assembly 100, (3) spraying a cleaning liquid over the entire surface of the aluminum monolith 4, (4) allowing the aluminum monolith 4 to dry, (5) rinsing the aluminum monolith 4 with a solvent, and (6) wiping the polisher 6 using cold water and a paper towel.

The polishing process with the polishing agent (step 216 through 224) is repeated until the surface of the aluminum monolith has met predetermined values of surface roughness and surface accuracy.

In another preferred embodiment, as shown in FIG. 3, this invention also employs diamond particles for refining the pre-polished surface of the metallic monolith 4. Diamond particles, whose size is within the ranges of 0.25 to 0.5 microns for this invention, are sprinkled on the surface of the polisher 6, which is coated with the polishing agent. Then, for the refining process (Step 322), random motion polishing is performed for about 15 minutes to get rid of diffraction (i.e. rainbow effect) on the aluminum monolith to be polished.

Pre-polishing (Step 310) is performed until the surface of said metal substrate is of surface accuracy of 0.5 of a wave peak-to-valley and surface roughness of 100 angstroms rms. Diamond turning is one of the methods that can accomplish the surface accuracy and the surface roughness.

The bevel 12 may be formed adjacent to the surface to be polished during the present polishing process. (Step 301)

The bevel 12 may be formed by conventional optical polishing methods, e.g. grinding, sanding, brushing, polishing, etc. or by diamond turning. It is preferable to form the bevel 12 prior to the pre-polishing step (Step 310). However, the bevel 12 may be formed at any time during the pre-polishing step (Step 310) but prior to the polishing step. (Step 330)

The surface of the bevel 12 may be flat but is preferably rounded. Width of the bevel 12 may vary depending on width of the optical surface to be polished, typically in the range of 0.25 to 0.070 inch.

The polishing agent is applied to the surface of the polisher 6 of the polishing tool assembly 100 (Step 316). The polishing agent provides lubrication for the aluminum monolith to be polished. During the polishing operation (Step 322) of the polishing tool assembly 100, the polisher 6 should be covered with the polishing agent.

Diamond particles are sprinkled (Step 318) on the surface of the polisher 6, which is coated with the polishing agent in step 316. Then the aluminum substrate 4 is placed on the polisher 6 (Step 320). Next the pivot pin 2 is lowered into a small pre-drilled hole in the back of the aluminum monolith 4, and the assembly 100 is set to motion. As the machine spindle 10 rotates, the polisher 6 and the metal substrate 4 also rotate while the pivot pin 2 passes back and forth over the polisher 6 at a pre-determined distance. The geometry is such that all points of the polisher 6 and all points of the metal substrate 4 see the same amount of surface feet per minute of contact resulting in event material removal. The polishing operation (Step 330) is performed for a predetermined duration. The aluminum monolith 4 is inspected (Step 332) to determine if acceptable surface figure and roughness are achieved.

After the polishing operation (Step 330) and before the measuring operation (Step 334), which is to measure the surface of the metallic monolith for verifying whether predetermined values of surface roughness and surface accuracy have been obtained, the aluminum monolith needs to be cleaned (Step 332) to remove the polishing agent from the aluminum monolith 4 and the polisher 6. This cleaning process (Step 332) removes any residue of the polishing agent which might degrade on the aluminum monolith rate 4 and the polisher 6. The cleaning process (Step 332) involves water, a cleaning liquid comprising ammonia and water, paper towels, and a solvent such as acetone, and is performed in the following sequence: (1) deactivating the polishing tool assembly 100, (2) removing the aluminum monolith 6 from the polishing tool assembly 100, (3) spraying a cleaning liquid over entire surface of the aluminum monolith 4, (4) allowing the aluminum monolith 4 to dry, (5) rinsing the aluminum monolith 4 with a solvent, and (6) wiping the polisher 6 using cold water and a paper towel.

The polishing process with the polishing agent (step 326 through 334) is repeated until the surface of the aluminum monolith has met predetermined values of surface roughness and surface accuracy.

What is claimed is:

1. A process for producing an optical surface on a metallic monolith, which process comprises:
   providing a metallic monolith;
   forming a bevel on the metallic monolith;
   pre-polishing a surface of the metallic monolith to produce a pre-polished surface having a surface roughness of not more than 100 angstroms rms with a surface accuracy in terms of surface figure error of not more than about one-half of a wave peak-to-valley;
   polishing the pre-polished surface with a polishing agent comprising an aqueous dispersion of abrasive particles, a catalyst, and an organic solvent to produce a polished surface having a predetermined surface roughness with a surface accuracy; and
   cleaning the polished surface to remove the polishing agent therefrom.

2. The process of claim 1 including the additional steps of:
   i. diluting said polishing agent with water;
   ii. polishing the pre-polished surface with said diluted polishing agent; and
   iii. sequentially repeating steps i and ii to produce a polished surface having a surface having a predetermined surface roughness with a surface accuracy, wherein the mixing proportions of said polishing agent and said diluting water range from less than 100% to 50% and from greater than 0% to 50% by weight, respectively, based on the total weight of the diluted polishing agent.

3. The process of claim 1, wherein the pre-polishing of the surface of the metallic monolith is effected by diamond turning.
4. The process of claim 3, wherein the polishing agent comprises carbon black, ammonium hydroxide, phenol, ethylene glycol and water.

5. The process of claim 3, wherein carbon black, ammonium hydroxide, phenol, ethylene glycol and water are present in the polishing agent in amounts sufficient to provide the following respective percentages by weight, based on the total weight of the polishing agent: 7-8%, 1-2%, 0.2-1%, 1-2%, and 85-90%.

6. The process of claim 5, wherein the polishing agent is india ink.

7. The process of claim 3, wherein the polishing of the pre-polished surface with the polishing agent is effected by the method of random motion polishing.

8. The process of claim 3, wherein the metallic monolith is aluminum.

9. The process of claim 8, wherein the aluminum is 6061-T6 aluminum.

10. The process of claim 1 including the additional step of: cleaning said metallic monolith and a polisher; and measuring the surface of said metallic monolith for verifying whether predetermined values of surface roughness and surface accuracy have been obtained.

11. The process of claim 10 wherein said step of cleaning said metallic monolith and the polisher comprises: removing said metallic monolith from the polisher; spraying a cleaning liquid over said metallic monolith; allowing said metallic monolith to dry; rinsing said metallic monolith with a solvent; and wiping the polisher using cold water and a paper towel.

12. The process of claim 11 wherein said cleaning liquid comprises ammonia and water.

13. The process of claim 11 wherein said solvent is acetone.

14. The process of claim 1 wherein the bevel forming step is performed prior to the pre-polishing step.

15. The process of claim 1 wherein the bevel forming step is performed prior to the polishing step.

16. A process for producing an optical surface on a metallic monolith, which process comprises: providing a metallic monolith; forming a bevel on the metallic monolith; pre-polishing a surface of the metallic monolith to produce a pre-polished surface having a surface roughness of not more than 100 angstroms rms with a surface accuracy in terms of surface figure error of not more than about one-half of a wave peak-to-valley; refining the pre-polished surface by rubbing thereof with an abrasive in combination with a polishing agent, the abrasive comprising diamond particles, and the polishing agent comprising an aqueous dispersion of abrasive particles, a catalyst, and an organic solvent, for a period of time sufficient to produce a refined surface showing no rainbow effect or diffraction; cleaning the refined surface and a polisher to remove said abrasive and said polishing agent therefrom; polishing the cleaned surface with the polishing agent to produce a polished surface having a predetermined surface roughness with a surface accuracy; and cleaning the polished surface to remove the polishing agent therefrom.

17. The process of claim 16 including the additional steps of:

   i. diluting said polishing agent with water;
   ii. polishing the pre-polished surface with said diluted polishing agent; and
   iii. sequentially repeating steps i and ii to produce a polished surface having a surface having a predetermined surface roughness with a surface accuracy, wherein the mixing proportions of said polishing agent and said diluting water range from less than 100% to 50% and from greater than 0% to 50% by weight, respectively, based on the total weight of the diluted polishing agent.

18. The process of claim 16 wherein the pre-polishing of the surface of the metallic monolith is effected by diamond turning.

19. The process of claim 18 wherein the polishing agent comprises carbon black, ammonium hydroxide, phenol, ethylene glycol and water.

20. The process of claim 19 wherein carbon black, ammonium hydroxide, phenol, ethylene glycol and water are present in the polishing agent in amounts sufficient to provide the following respective percentages by weight, based on the total weight of the polishing agent: 7-8%, 1-2%, 0.2-1%, 1-2%, and 85-90%.

21. The process of claim 20 wherein the polishing agent is india ink.

22. The process of claim 17 wherein the polishing of the pre-polished surface with the polishing agent is effected by the method of random motion polishing.

23. The process of claim 18 wherein the metallic monolith is aluminum.

24. The process of claim 23 wherein the aluminum is 6061-T6 aluminum.

25. The process of claim 18 wherein the size of said diamond particles is within the ranges of 0.25 to 0.5 microns.

26. The process of claim 18 wherein the time period for said refining process with said diamond particles is about 15 minutes.

27. The process of claim 16 including the additional step of:

   cleaning said metallic monolith and said polisher; and measuring the surface of said metallic monolith for verifying whether predetermined values of surface roughness and surface accuracy have been obtained.

28. The process of claim 27 wherein said step of cleaning said metallic monolith and the polisher comprises: removing said metallic monolith from the polisher; spraying a cleaning liquid over said metallic monolith; allowing said metallic monolith to dry; rinsing said metallic monolith with a solvent; and wiping the polisher using cold water and a paper towel.

29. The process of claim 28 wherein said cleaning liquid comprises ammonia and water.

30. The process of claim 29 wherein said solvent is acetone.

31. The process of claim 16 wherein the bevel forming step is performed prior to the pre-polishing step.

32. The process of claim 16 wherein the bevel forming step is performed prior to the polishing step.