

## Renewed interest in cryogenic etching processes: what are the advantages of cooling the substrate?

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✓ Introduction, history and principle of cryoetching

- ✓ Deep Cryo-Etching of Silicon
- ✓ Passivation layer formation by SiF<sub>4</sub>/O<sub>2</sub> plasma
- ✓ Passivation steps using  $CF_4$  plasma instead of  $C_4F_8$
- ✓ Cryo Atomic Layer Etching
- ✓ What makes cryogenic etching popular again in the industry ?
- ✓ What are the advantages of cooling the substrate ?

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# Introduction, principle and history of cryo-etching of Silicon

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#### Introduction to cryochemistry

- It is counterintuitive that chemical reactions can be accelerated at low temperature, by freezing. <sup>[1]</sup>
- However, this phenomenon has been highlighted by the "cryo-chemistry" community since the 50<sup>ies</sup>.<sup>[2]</sup>

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Example <sup>[3]</sup>: in the following reaction,
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 $aA + bB \rightarrow products$ 

The reaction rate is given by :

Rate =  $k'[A]^a[B]^b$ 

k' is the rate coefficient and follows an Arrhenius law

 $k' = A' \exp(-E_a/RT)$ 

A' = Arrhenius pre-exponential factor E<sub>a</sub> : activation energy

By decreasing T, k' should decrease as well. A' (frequency factor) should also decrease as T decreases



<sup>[1]</sup> 2021: An, L.-Y. et al. Advances in Cryochemistry: Mechanisms, Reactions and Applications. Molecules 26 750
 <sup>[2]</sup> 1962: H. A. McGee and W. J. Martin Cryochemistry, Cryogenics, vol2 (5) 257
 <sup>[3]</sup> 2023: Jiaxin Lv et al. Freeze-accelerated reactions on environmental relevant processes Cell reports Physical Science 4 101456



#### Example in a frozen solution or impure solid, there is a gradual transition from solid to liquid



Freezing begins when T is below the freezing point

- In the frozen state, the substance is in equilibrium between its solid and liquid phases.
- Unfrozen regions behave as « micropockets » and provide special microenvironments for chemical reactions.
- If all solutes are rejected from ice crystals to the unfrozen solution, the concentrations of solutes A and B in the micropockets, [A]<sub>mp</sub> and [B]<sub>mp</sub> can be expressed as:

 $[A]_{mp} = [A] C_{mp} / C_{T} \qquad [B]_{mp} = [B] C_{mp} / C_{T} \qquad Rate = k' [A]_{mp}^{a} [B]_{mp}^{b}$ 

⇒ Concentration effect which accelerates the reaction

<sup>[1]</sup> 1996: Norimichi Takenaka et al. Acceleration Mechanism of Chemical Reaction by Freezing J. Phys. Chem., Vol. 100, No. 32 <sup>[2]</sup> 2023: Jiaxin Lv et al. Freeze-accelerated reactions on environmental relevant processes Cell reports Physical Science 4 101456



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## Brief history of the cryogenic etching process

Tachi's team proposed to cool the substrate down to a temperature between **-100** and **-130°C** while running a **microwave SF<sub>6</sub> plasma** to etch silicon anisotropically.

1988 : S. Tachi et Al. Appl. Phys. Lett., 52(8), 616(1988)

The idea was to **freeze chemical reactions** on vertical sidewalls of the sample and favor ion-assisted reactions at the feature bottom.



FIG. 3. Silicon profile etched at  $\sim$  with the use of SF<sub>6</sub> gas plasma.



performed with high selectivities of 30 for organic resist films. High etch rates of 500 and 1000 nm/min by reactive ion etching and microwave plasma etching, respectively, were achieved with a  $SF_6$  gas plasma at low wafer temperatures from (-130 to -100 °C). It is concluded that



## Brief history of the cryogenic process (cont'd)

- 1995 : J. W. Bartha et Al. Microelectron. J., 43, 453(1995)



plasma source. In contrast to the current understanding of low temperature etching, we did not observe a "freezing" of the lateral etching reaction, but obtained isotropic etch profiles, even at temperatures below  $-120^{\circ}$  C. Anisotropic etch profiles are obtained by an addition of O<sub>2</sub>. We therefore propose a sidewall passivation

For the first time, a mechanism based on sidewall passivation was suggested in cryogenic etching instead of a mechanism based on a low reaction probability of the radicals on very cold silicon surfaces.



#### Principle of cryoetching of Silicon

 $SF_6/O_2$  plasma

✓ Chemical etching (selective) SiF<sub>4</sub> : main etching product

✓ Passivation layer (SiO<sub>x</sub>F<sub>y</sub>)

Only forms at very low temperature

 ✓ Fragile passivation layer, easily removed by ion bombardment

Simultaneous mechanisms



Silicon (100) cooled down at -100°C and negatively biased

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#### Typical reactor used for cryoetching





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## **Deep Cryo-Etching of Silicon**

# Passivation layer characterization in SF<sub>6</sub>/O<sub>2</sub> plasma

TREF



# Role of oxygen, temperature and ion bombardment





⇒ What is the composition of the passivation layer ? What is the role of the etched by-products ?

⇒ What are the main mechanisms involved in the formation of the passivation layer ? Why is it necessary to cool the substrate?

⇒ How to enhance the robustness of the passivation layer in the cryogenic process ?



#### **Ex-Situ XPS analysis**

**Objective of this experiment** : analyze the passivation layer after etching, but without leaving the sample being oxidized by the ambient air.

Method :

1. After etching, the sample is removed from the reactor in the glove box 1 full of pure  $N_2\,\text{gas}$ 

2. Transportation of the wafer (under pure  $N_2$ ) toward the glove box 2 where cleavage is performed. (Residual  $O_2$  rate controlled <0.1 %).

3. After cleavage, transportation of the trench to be analyzed in another lab in a 3<sup>rd</sup> glove box for XPS.



## Ex-Situ XPS analysis (cont'd)



	Lines	Peak Center [eV]	Ratio (±0.01)		1
(Nearly ne evidetion (CiO) on the requireted			Α	В	С
v Nearly no oxidation (SIO <sub>2</sub> ) on the passivated	F/Si-Si	F 1s-688	0.02	0.02	0.01
surfaces.	O / Si-Si	O 1s–533.5	0.13	0.15	0.14
· Low contamination	C / Si-Si	C 1s- 285.3	0.11	0.15	0.11
	Si-O / Si-Si	Si 2p-103.7	0.03	0.03	0.03

⇒ The passivation layer **is removed when** the wafer is warmed back up to ambient temperature

<sup>(1)</sup>R. Dussart et al J. Micromech. Microeng., 14, 190-196 (2004)



## Desorbed species - Mass spectrometry analysis

Passivation layer characterization by mass spectrometry

analyze the desorbed species coming from trench sidewalls when the wafer is warmed back to ambient temperature.



X. Mellhaoui et al., J. Appl. Phys., 98, 104901 (2005)





#### In-situ X-Ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy



#### **OPTIMIST Platform (IMN, Nantes)**



Christophe Cardinaud, Aurélie Girard







 $SF_6/O_2$  in **RF** Antenna TCP type Hemispherical overpassivating ICP power (1) analyzer Matching regime network  $Al_2O_3$ 4 gas feed Electrostatic X-ray source lenses T controller Electrons To XPS chamber Load lock Photons Sample rod -180°C < T < +1100°C Differential **Surface analysis** pumping



#### In-situ X-Ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy





> Decrease of SiO<sub>x</sub>F<sub>4-x</sub> contribution with temperature
 > Appearance and increase of Si matrix contribution

[O]<sub>at</sub> remains almost constant from -75°C
[F]<sub>at</sub> decreases from -75°C



### Silicon matrix after SF<sub>6</sub>/O<sub>2</sub> overpassivating plasma



JREMI /

+30°C

# Summary on the SiO<sub>x</sub>F<sub>y</sub> Passivation layer in $SF_6/O_2$ plasma

/ Thin  $SiO_xF_y$  formation by  $SF_6/O_2$  plasma at low temperature

SiO<sub>x</sub>F<sub>y</sub> 0 c-Si



In SF<sub>6</sub>/O<sub>2</sub> plasma, fluorine radicals will form SiF<sub>x</sub> sites at the silicon surface and oxygen will react with SiF<sub>x</sub> sites to form a thin SiO<sub>x</sub>F<sub>y</sub> layer.

⇒ quite fragile passivation layer.



# Passivation layer formation by SiF<sub>4</sub>/O<sub>2</sub> plasma

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### Passivation layer construction with SiF<sub>4</sub>

Two cavity test experiments to study the passivation layer formation

- <u>**Principle :</u>** we start with an isotropic etching (**Ini**tial profile)</u>
  - we try to form the passivation layer with  $SiF_4$  and  $O_2$





#### **STiGer process**

Alternation of isotropic SF<sub>6</sub> etching steps and SiF<sub>4</sub>/O<sub>2</sub> passivation steps 4 alternances 1min SF<sub>6</sub> etching - SiF<sub>4</sub>/O<sub>2</sub> deposition + a final 1 min etch

#### -83°C



Same experiment at **0°C** 



Anisotropic microstructures can be obtained by alternating  $SF_6$ etching and  $SiF_4/O_2$  passivation steps, but it only works at cryogenic temperature





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### In-situ X-Ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy

**SiF**<sub>4</sub> **/ O**<sub>2</sub> plasma experimental conditions: **a-Si sample** ; 30 s ; SiF<sub>4</sub> /O<sub>2</sub> : 25 % ; 3.0 Pa ; 200 W ICP power ; no bias.

SiO<sub>x</sub>F<sub>y</sub> layer growth at 3 different temperatures : -40, -65 and -100°C

/ At -40°C, 17.1% [F] ; 23.6% [O]

After heating: no significant change

// At -65°C, 20.0% [F] ; 22.8% [O]

After heating: a little decrease of [F]

// At -100°C, 52.3% [F] ; 18.0% [O] ; 15% [N] (stoechiometry of ~SiOF<sub>3</sub>)

After heating: a large part of Fluorine based species has desorbed



#### **OPTIMIST** Platform



G. Antoun et al 2022 ECS J. Solid State Sci. Technol. 11 013013



#### 2014 : Molecular dynamics by Stefan Tinck from PLASMANT laboratory (Antwerpen)

S. Tinck et al. J. Phys. Chem. C 2014, 118, 30315-30324

Fluorine – silicon surface reactions at cryogenic temperature

Calculated **probabilities for immediate sticking** upon impact of various impinging species on different surfaces <sup>(1)</sup>

Impinging species	on Si		on SiF		on SiF <sub>2</sub>		on SiF <sub>3</sub>	
	300 K	173 K	300 K	173 K	300 K	173 K	300 K	173 K
F	0,98	0,98	0,92	0,93	0,59	0,61	0,23	0,25
Si	1	1	1	1	0,41	0,40	0,20	0,19
Si <sub>F</sub>	0,88	0,89	0,49	0,50	0	0	0	0
SiF <sub>2</sub>	0,51	0,50	0,18	0,19	0	0	0	0
SiF <sub>3</sub>	0,37	0,37	0,06	0,06	0	0	0	0
SiF <sub>4</sub>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
$F_2$	1	1	1	1	0,77	0,77	0,3	0,31

#### Sticking : creation of a chemical bond (within 12.5 ps in this work).



Probabilities for Immediate Sticking do not depend on temperature from 173 to 300 K ! E<sub>a</sub> increases by lowering T, due to smaller oscillation amplitudes between adsorbent and surface.

⇒ Long thermal desorption time at low temperature as compared to room temperature ⇒ longer residence time of the species at the surface



∋REMi∥



#### Conclusion on $SiF_4/O_2$ plasma at low T

// It is possible to reinforce the passivation layer by using  $SiF_4/O_2$  plasma steps



✓ SiF<sub>x</sub> radicals coming from SiF<sub>4</sub> dissociation deposit on the sidewalls with a much longer residence time. They react with oxygen atoms to create a thicker SiO<sub>x</sub>F<sub>y</sub> layer.
⇒ more robust passivation layer.

#### ⇒ STiGer process

Alternation of  $SF_6$  plasma –  $SiF_4/O_2$  plasma



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# Passivation steps using CF<sub>4</sub> plasma instead of C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub>

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- C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub> is the main gas used for passivation steps at room temperature in the so-called Bosch process to cover the sidewalls with a CF<sub>x</sub> protective layer
- Low F/C ratio gases are highly polymerizing
- Deposition regime unless a high bias voltage is applied
- But, CF<sub>x</sub> deposits everywhere even on reactor walls, leading to process drifts.
- Cleaning steps are needed



Adapted from J. W. Coburn and H. F. Winters, Plasma etching—A discussion of mechanisms, J Vac Sci Technol 16, 391 (1979)

- / The boundary line can be shifted to the right by decreasing the substrate temperature
- Is it possible to use CF<sub>4</sub> instead of C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub> at low temperature ?



#### CF<sub>4</sub> plasma at cryogenic temperature

J. Nos et al. Appl. Phys. Lett. 126, 031602 (2025)

Etching step: 3 s 300 sccm SF<sub>6</sub>, 3 Pa, 1500 Ws, -135 Vb **x200** Passivation step: 2 s 20 sccm CF<sub>4</sub>, 1 Pa, 1500 Ws, -65 Vb

=> Strong CF<sub>x</sub> deposition at -100°C

=> Enhanced passivation at -100°C

- CF concentration drops at low wafer temperature, which shows that CF sticks more efficiently at low temperature. This is not the case for CF<sub>2</sub>.
- CF<sub>4</sub> is a good candidate to passivate the trench sidewalls without depositing on the reactor walls.



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# **Cryo-Atomic Layer Etching**

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### **Principle of Atomic Layer Etching**





## Atomic Layer Etching for SiO<sub>2</sub>



# **Principle of Cryo-Atomic Layer Etching for SiO<sub>2</sub> Precursor** w/o plasma **Adsorbed** layer SiO<sub>2</sub> substrate Purge Cooled substrate holder Ar plasma Purge

#### **Self-Limiting Etching**



### Inductively Coupled Plasma (ICP) reactor



#### Parameter range:

- Fast ALD valves for C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub> gas injection
- Pressure : 1 10 Pa
- Power : 500 3000 W
- Bias : 0 100 V
- C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub> : 0 14 sccm
- Ar : 0 280 sccm
- Temperature : -150 30 °C

#### Diagnostic:

- In-situ ellipsometry
- Mass spectrometry



#### **Proof of principle**



No etching at -110 °C (and higher temperatures)

G.Antoun et al, Appl. Phys. Lett. 115, 153109 (2019)

## Cryo-ALE of SiO<sub>2</sub> based on C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub> physisorption



#### At constant pressure, by decreasing temperature:

Several desorption rates are observed



- Desorption rate ↘
- Residence time on the substrate surface *▶*

G. Antoun et al., Sci. Rep. 41598 (2020) 79560



## **Desorption rate**

$$t_d = t_d^0 exp^{E_d/k_BT}$$

 $t_d$ : residence time (s)

 $t_d^0$ : attempt time of the particle for desorption (s)

 $E_d$ : desorption energy (eV)



# Cryo-ALE of SiO<sub>2</sub> based on C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub> physisorption at higher temperature



150 cycles at -90°C



• No drift observed due to reactor wall contamination

≈ 18 nm etched in 150 cycles



D I Sung et al Applied Surface Science 670 (2024) 160574



- Cryo Atomic Layer Etching of SiO<sub>2</sub> was shown by physisorbing C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub> at the surface at -120°C followed by Ar plasma.
- A threshold temperature has to be reached to enable cryo-ALE.
- Residence time of physisorbed species can be determined by mass spectrometry.
- **Ar plasma** has to be ignited before the end of the residence time.
- Reactor wall contamination is significantly reduced. The etch per cycle remains quite regular, even after many cycles.
- Self-Limiting Etching is achieved.



# What makes cryogenic etching popular again in the industry ?

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## SiO<sub>2</sub> and Si<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> deep etching

Need to etch very high aspect ratio holes on  $Si_3N_4$  and  $SiO_2$  for 3D NAND technology.



From H.I. Lee et al. ACS Sustainable Chem. Eng. 9, 4948, 2021

- Usually, CF-based plasmas (C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>8</sub>, CHF<sub>3</sub>...) are used to etch SiO<sub>2</sub> and Si<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> at room temperature.
- However, some deposition occurs on the carbon mask which leads to striation on the dielectric film
- // This aperture reduction increases the ARDE effect.

Mitsuhiro Omura et al 2019 Jpn. J. Appl. Phys. 58 SEEB02





## Why using cryoetching ?

(Å∕min)

etch rate

SiO2

#### / Increase of etch rate of $SiO_2$ at low T in $CHF_3$ plasma.

Conditions : CHF<sub>3</sub> gas Magnetron RIE system P = 40 mTorr RF power density : 1.4 W/cm<sup>2</sup>

T. Ohiwa, et al. Jpn. J. Appl. Phys.31. 405-410(1992)

- CF<sub>4</sub>/H<sub>2</sub> plasma cryoetching : etch rate increases by adding H<sub>2</sub>
- I They showed by in-situ FTIR that HF was forming at the surface at low temperature

S-N. Hsiao et al. Small Methods 2400090 (2024)





Pure HF and H<sub>2</sub>O plasma mixture can be used to etch SiO<sub>2</sub> and Si<sub>3</sub>N<sub>4</sub> at low temperature (below -40°C) with high energy ions.



Y. Kihara et al. 2023 IEEE Symposium on VLSI Technology and Circuits (VLSI Technology and Circuits), Kyoto, Japan, 1-2 (2023).

G. S. Oehrlein et al., "Future of plasma etching for microelectronics: Challenges and opportunities" JVST. B 42, 041501 (2024)

### SiO<sub>2</sub> cryoetching in SF<sub>6</sub>/H<sub>2</sub> plasma





Pressure (Pa)

SiO<sub>2</sub> cryoetching versus H<sub>2</sub> % (0,6 Pa, 150 W bias)





- In terms of physical and chemical mechanisms, cooling the substrate can :
  - Increase the residence time of physisorbed species
  - // Promote chemical reactions at the surface
  - Modify the stoichiometry of the deposited layer
  - Create a mix between physisorbed and chemisorbed species at the surface
  - // Limit surface diffusion
- In terms of process, cooling the substrate can:
  - Avoid contamination of the reactor walls
  - Increase the etch rate
  - Increase the selectivity
  - Protect porous material during etching



#### PlaCEP workshop (Plasma Cryogenic Etching Processes)

1<sup>st</sup> edition in 2022 : Orléans (France)
2<sup>nd</sup> edition in 2024 : Leuven (Belgium)
3<sup>rd</sup> edition in 2025 : New Taipei (Taiwan)

The *3<sup>rd</sup> PlaCEP Workshop* will take place at Ming Chi University of Technology in New Taipei City, Taiwan in June 25-28, 2025

organized within the International Plasma Technology Joint Conference 2025 (IPTJC-2025)



International Plasma Technology Joint Conference

Cryogenic etching processes of silicon, dielectrics, cryo-ALE, modeling and simulation







## Acknowledgment



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# Thank you !

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