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(54) **SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICE WITH DIODE REGION**

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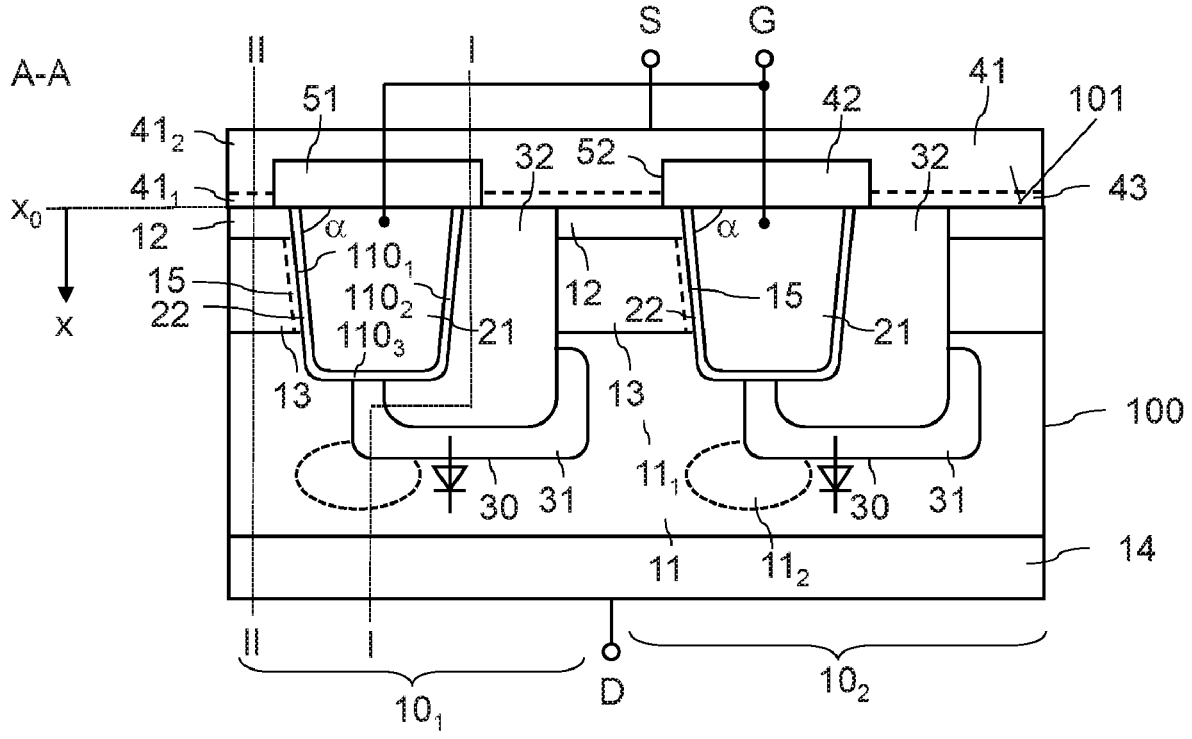
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A semiconductor device includes a SiC body having a first surface, a gate trench extending from the first surface into the SiC body and having a first sidewall, a second sidewall opposite the first sidewall, and a bottom, a source region of a first conductivity type formed in the SiC body and adjoining the first sidewall of the gate trench, a drift region of the first conductivity type formed in the SiC body below the source region, a body region of a second conductivity type formed in the SiC body between the source region and the drift region and adjoining the first sidewall of the gate trench, and a diode region of the second conductivity type formed in the SiC body and adjoining the second sidewall and the bottom of the gate trench but not the first sidewall of the gate trench.



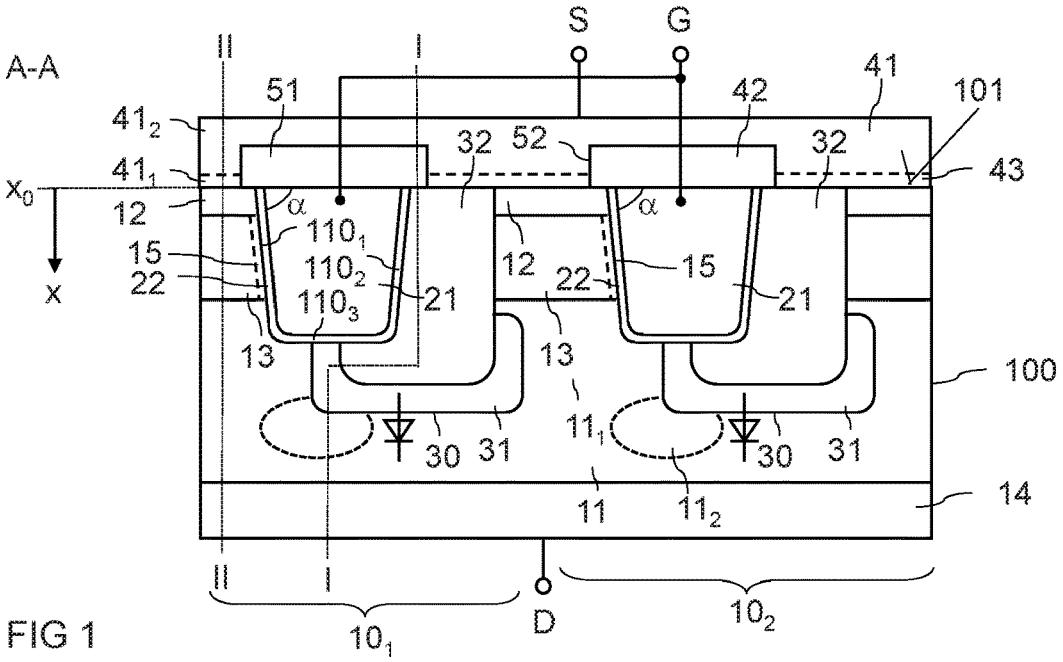


FIG 1

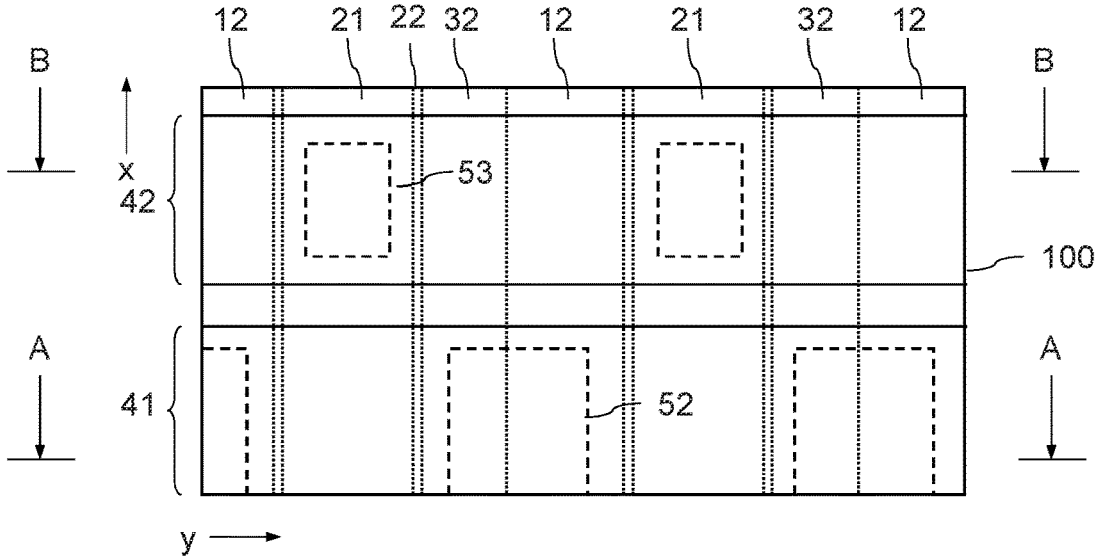


FIG 2

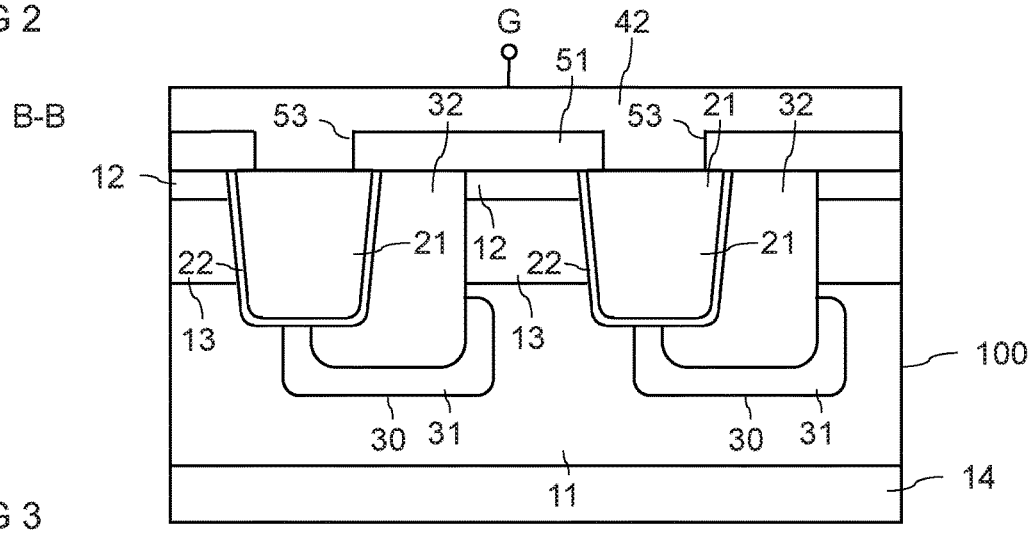


FIG 3

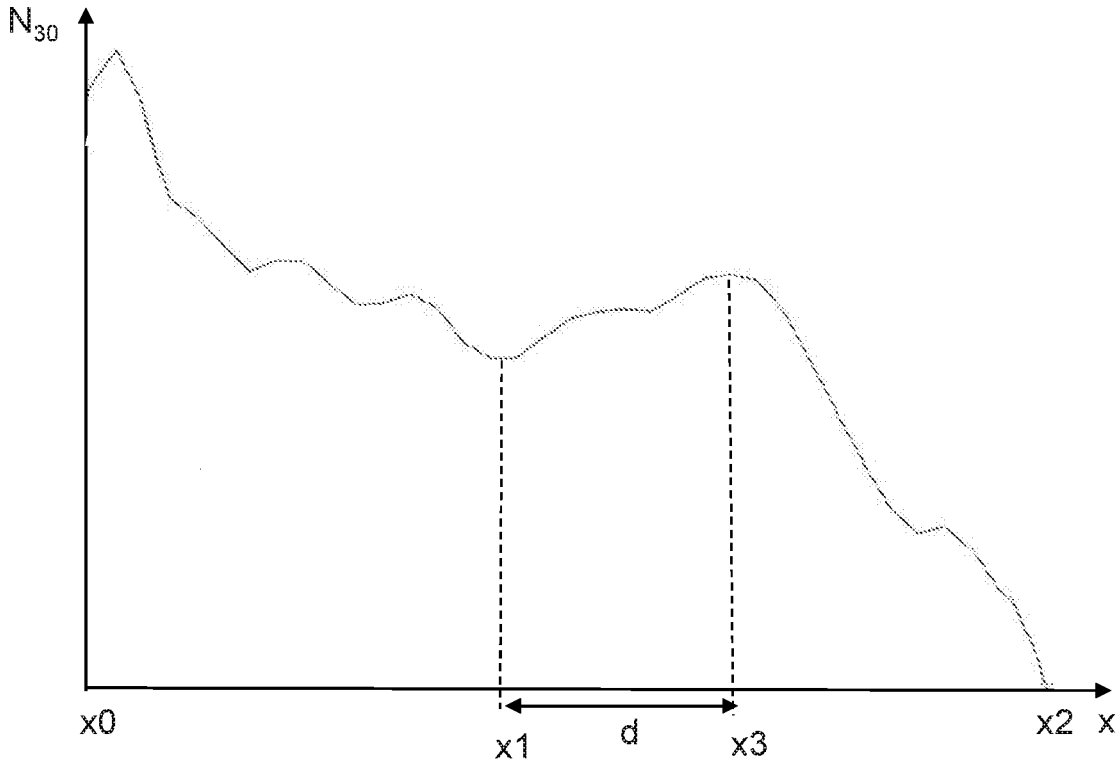


FIG 4

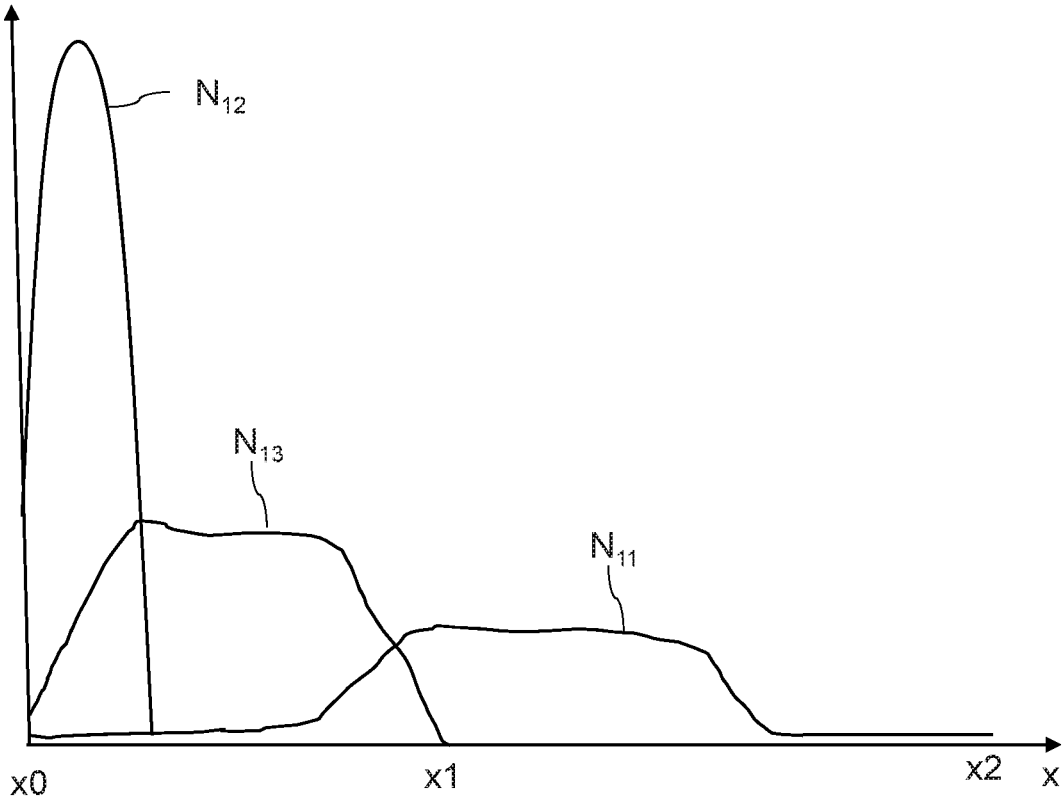
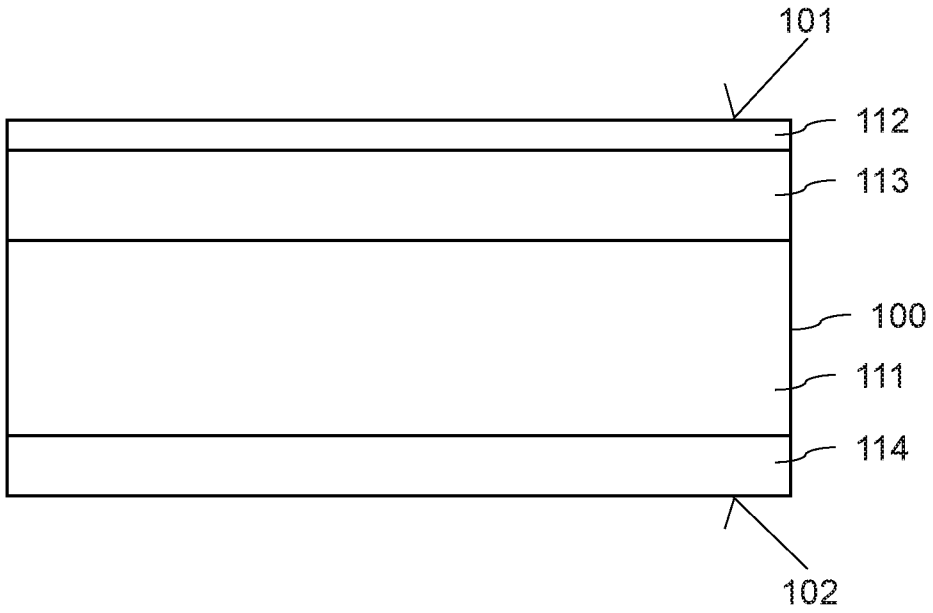


FIG 5


101
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113
100
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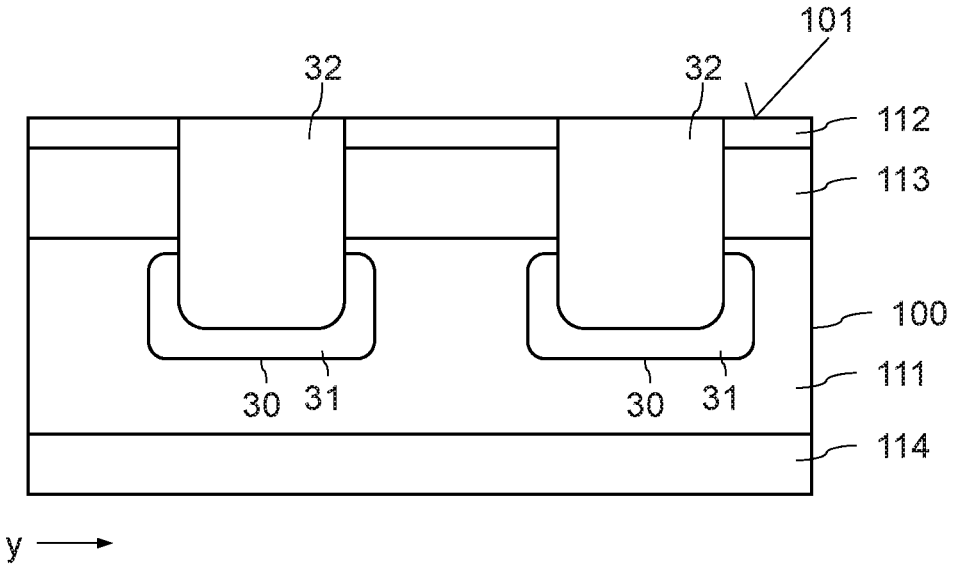
114
102

FIG 6A


101
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y

FIG 6B

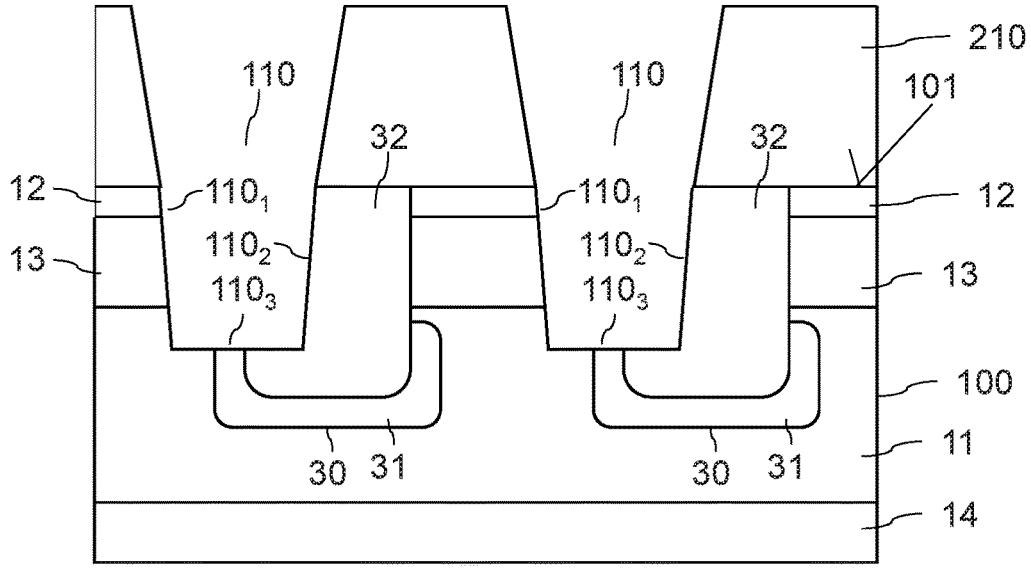


FIG 6C

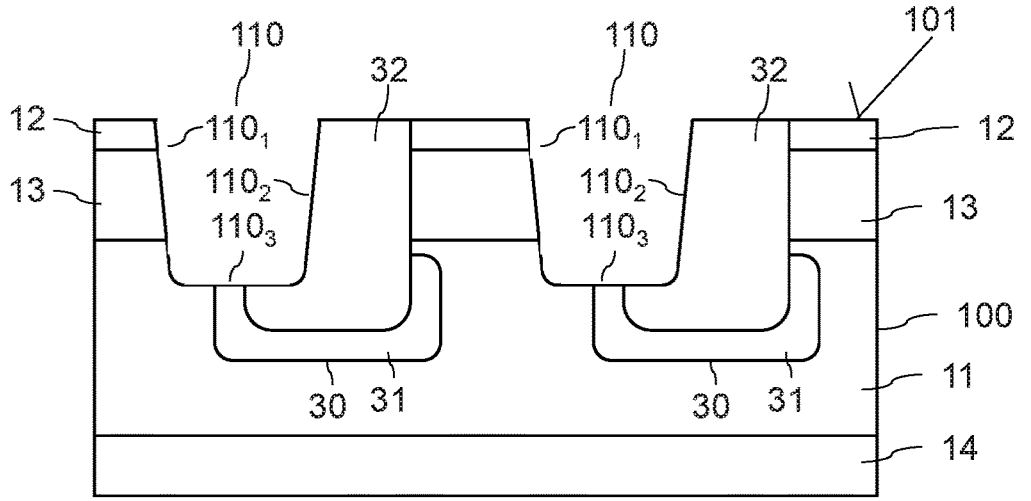


FIG 6D

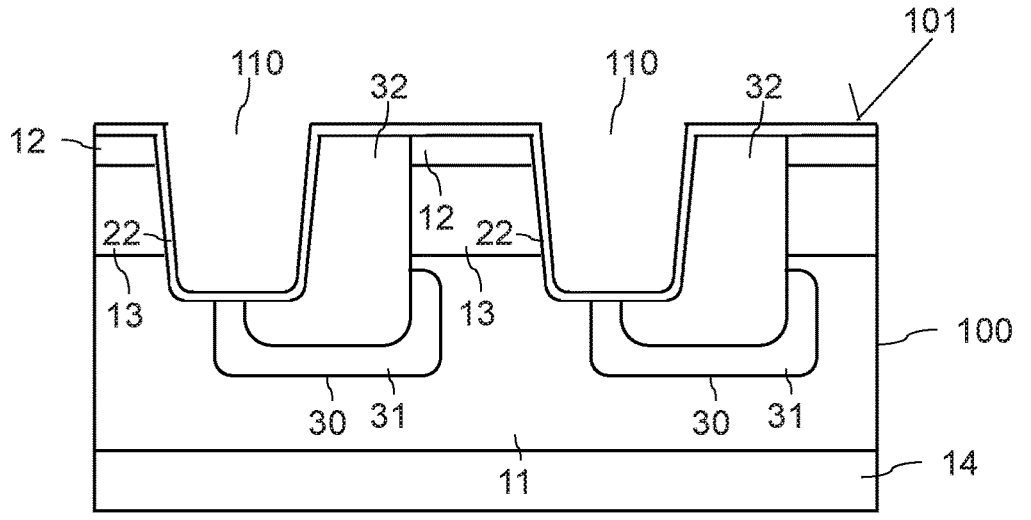
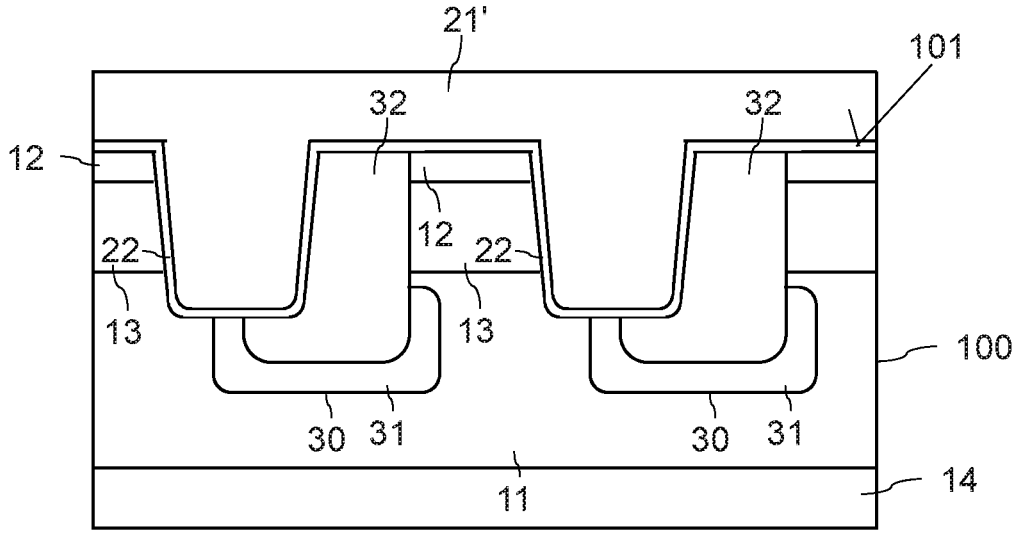


FIG 6E



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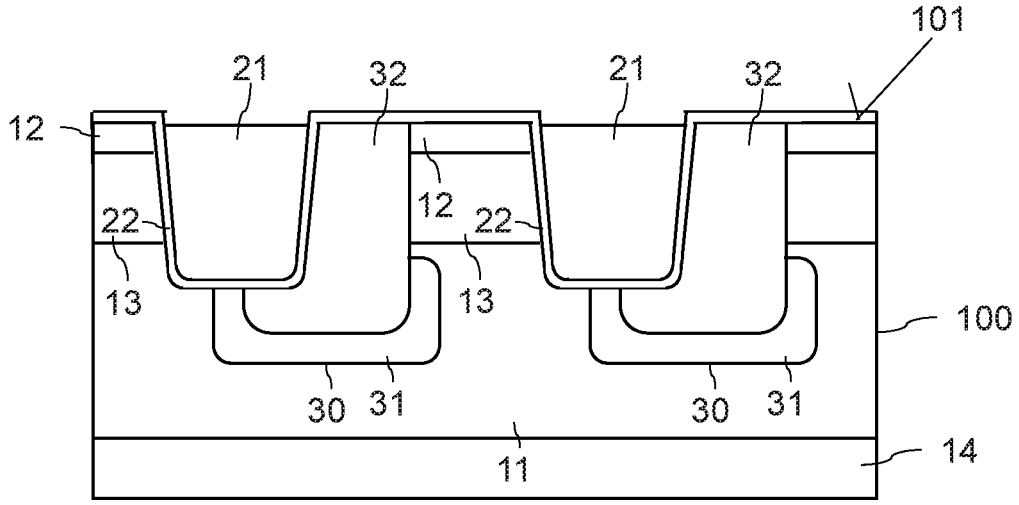

FIG 6G

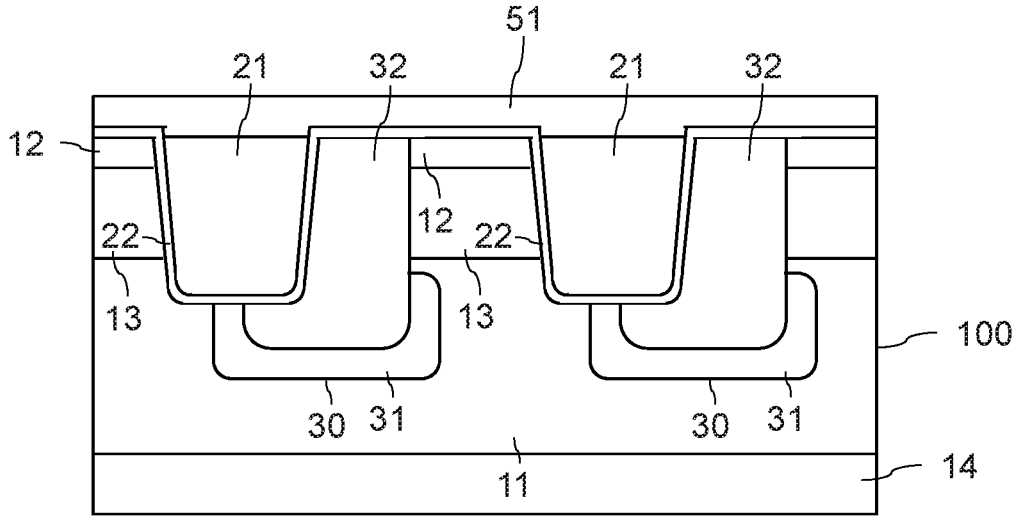

FIG 6H

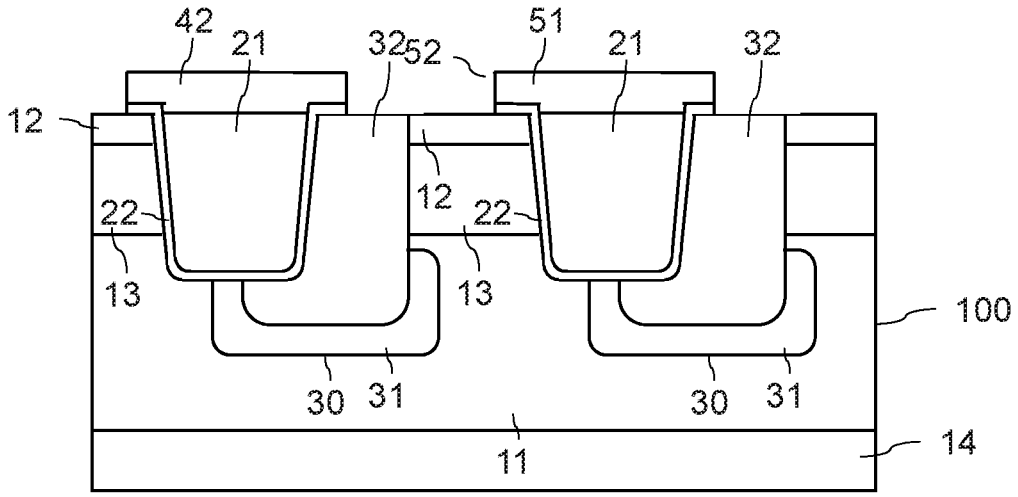
42
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FIG 6I

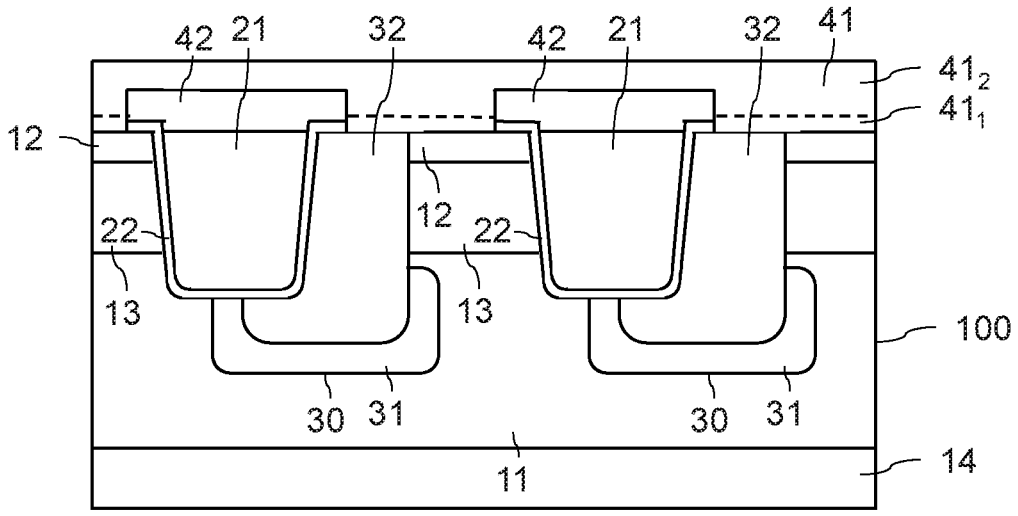
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FIG 6J

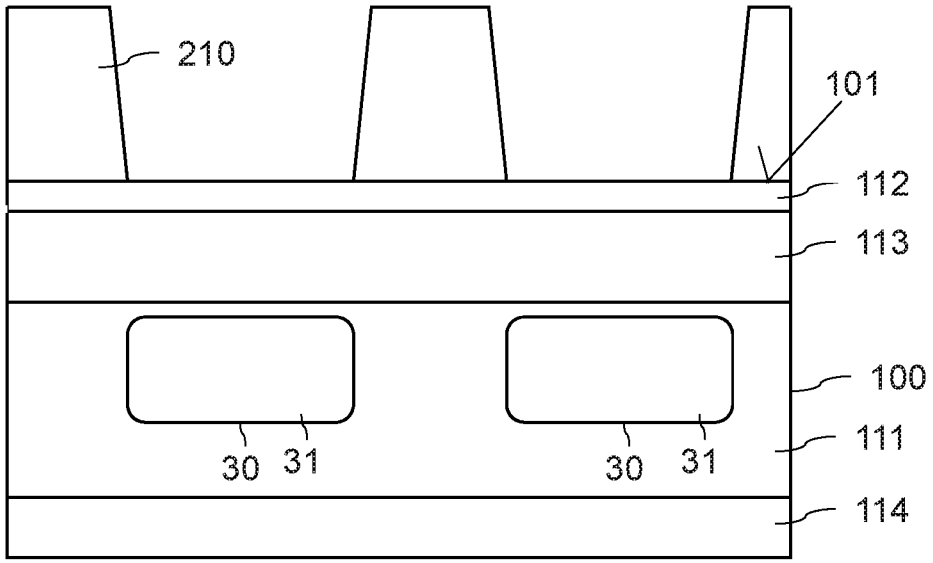
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FIG 7A

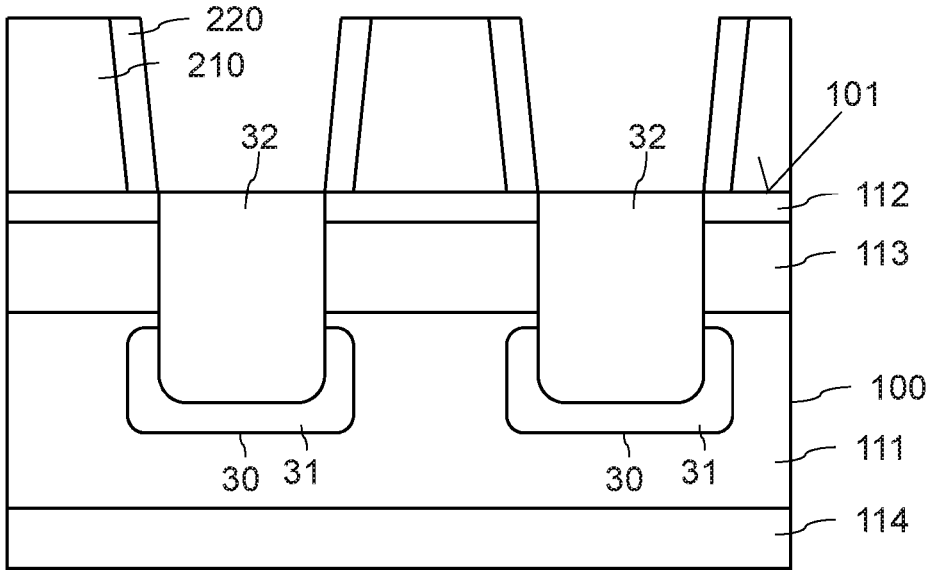
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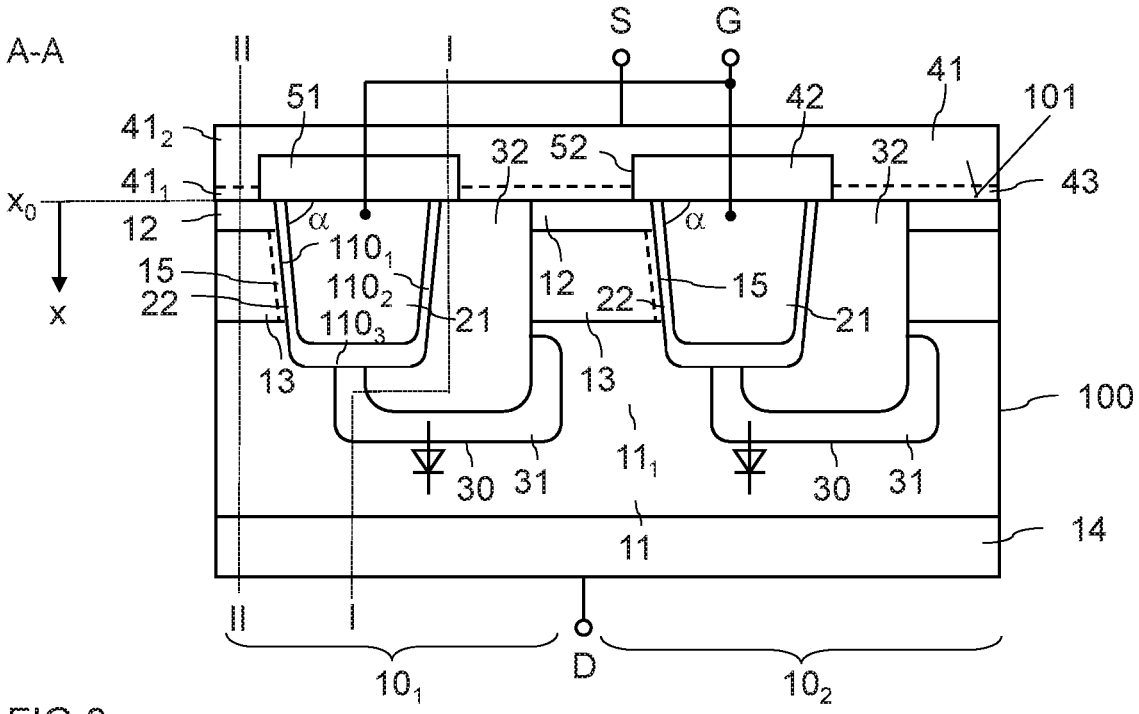
FIG 7B


A-A
II
I
S
G
51
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41
101
41_2
41_1
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43
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α
110_1
15
110_2
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22
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110_3
21
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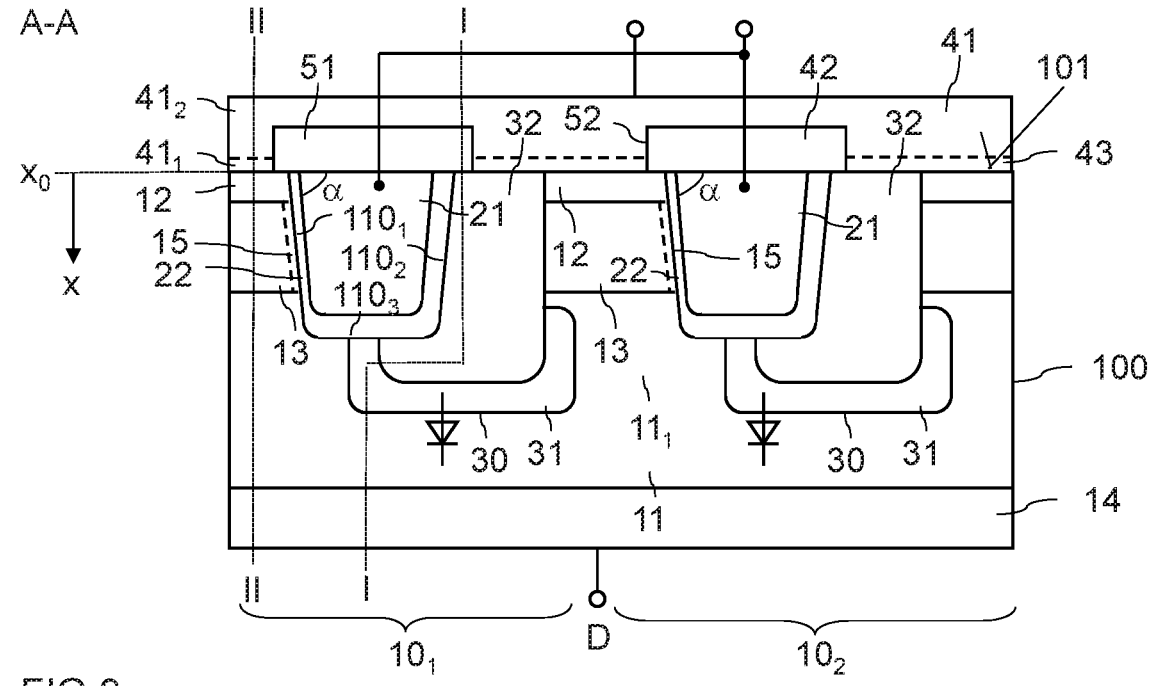
II
I
D
10_1
10_2

FIG 8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10_1
10_2

FIG 9

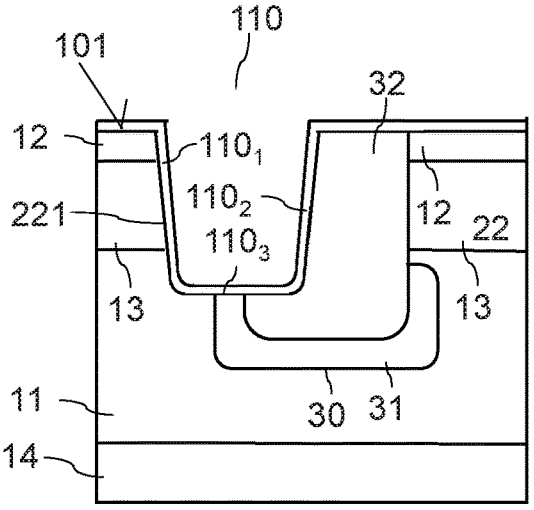

FIG 10A

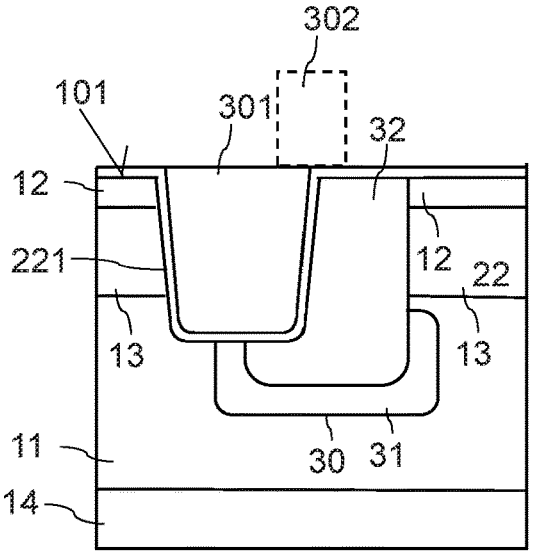

FIG 10B

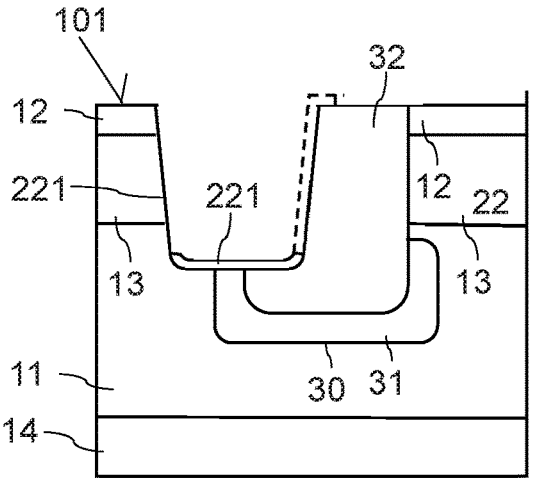

FIG 10C

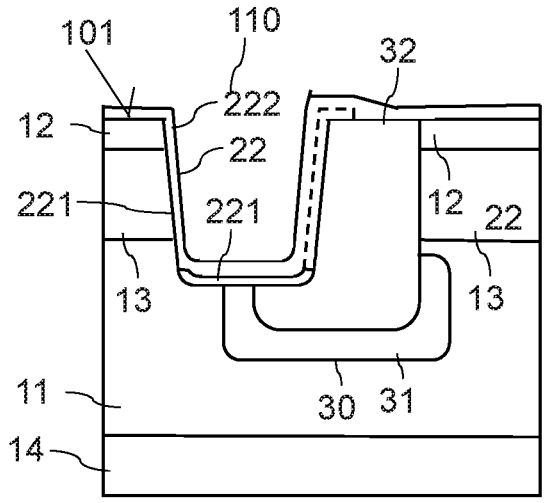

FIG 10D

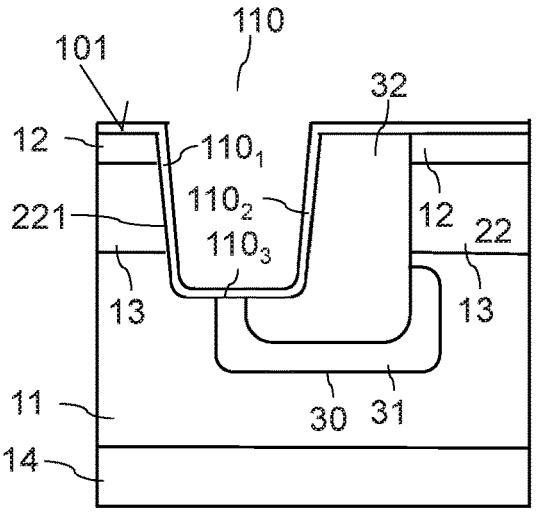

FIG 11A

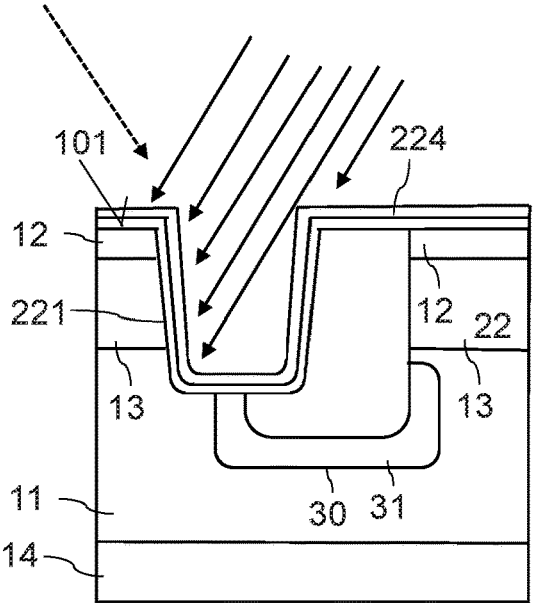

FIG 11B

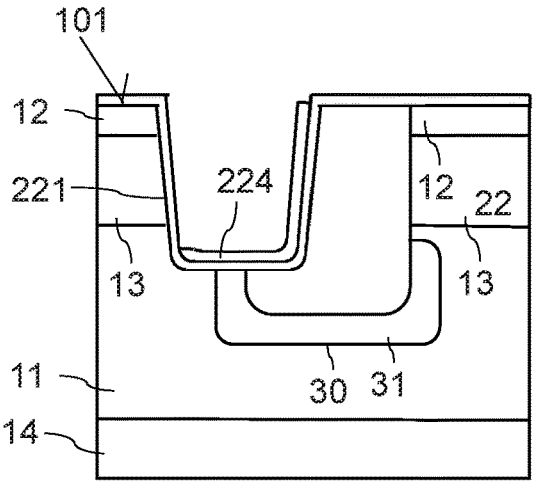

FIG 11C

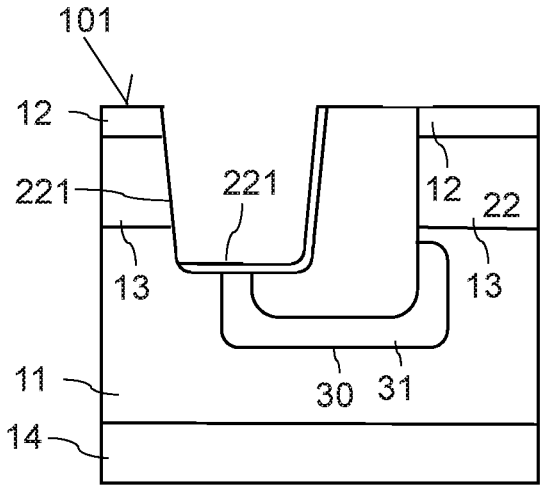

FIG 11D

SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICE WITH DIODE REGION

BACKGROUND

[0001] Power transistors, which are transistors with voltage blocking capabilities of up to several hundred volts and with a high current rating, can be implemented as vertical MOS trench transistors. In this case, a gate electrode of the transistor can be arranged in a trench that extends in a vertical direction of the semiconductor body. The gate electrode is dielectrically insulated from source, body and drift regions of the transistor and is adjacent the body region in a lateral direction of the semiconductor body. A drain region usually adjoins the drift region, and a source electrode is connected to the source region.

[0002] In many applications it is desirable to have a diode connected in parallel to a load path (drain-source path) of the transistor. An integrated body diode of the transistor may be used for this purpose. The body diode is formed by a pn junction between the body region and the drift region. In order to connect the body diode parallel to the load path of the transistor, the body region may simply be electrically connected to the source electrode. The body diode, however, may have a current rating that is lower than desired in some applications.

[0003] Power transistors may be implemented with conventional semiconductor materials such as silicon (Si) or silicon carbide (SiC). Due to the specific properties of SiC, the use of SiC allows to implement power transistors with a higher voltage blocking capability (at a given on-resistance) than Si. High blocking voltages, however, result in high electric fields in the semiconductor body, specifically at the pn-junction between the body region and the drift region. Usually there are sections of the gate electrode and of the gate dielectric arranged close to this pn junction. Problems may occur, when the dielectric strength of the gate dielectric is not sufficient for a desired voltage blocking capability of the transistor device. In this case, the gate dielectric may breakdown early.

[0004] There is a need to provide a semiconductor device with a transistor device and a diode, wherein a gate electrode of the transistor is protected from high electric fields, and wherein the diode has a high current rating and low losses.

SUMMARY

[0005] One embodiment relates to a semiconductor device. The semiconductor device includes a semiconductor body and at least one device cell integrated in the semiconductor body. The at least one device cell includes a drift region, a source region, and a body region arranged between the source region and the drift region, a diode region, and a pn junction between the diode region and the drift region. The at least one device cell further includes a trench with a first sidewall, a second sidewall opposite the first sidewall, and a bottom, wherein the body region adjoins the first sidewall, the diode region adjoins the second sidewall, and the pn junction adjoins the bottom of the trench. A gate electrode of the at least one device cell is arranged in the trench and dielectrically insulated from the body region, the diode region and the drift region by a gate dielectric. The diode region includes a lower diode region arranged below the bottom of the trench which includes a maximum of a doping concentration distant to the bottom of the trench.

[0006] Another embodiment relates to a method of producing a semiconductor device. The method includes providing a semiconductor body with a drift region layer, a body region layer adjoining the drift region layer, and a source region layer adjoining the body region layer and forming a first surface of the semiconductor body. The method further includes forming at least one diode region such that the diode region extends from the first surface through the source region layer and the body region layer into the drift region layer, wherein the diode region and the drift region layer form one pn-junction, forming at least one trench having a first sidewall, a second sidewall opposite the first sidewall, and a bottom such that the at least one trench adjoins the body region layer on one of the first and second sidewalls, the diode region on the second sidewall and the pn-junction on the bottom. A gate electrode and a gate dielectric dielectrically insulating the gate electrode from the semiconductor body are formed in the at least one trench. Sections of the source region layer remaining after forming the diode regions) form source regions, and sections of the body region layer remaining after forming the at least one diode region form a body region Forming the at least one diode region comprises forming a lower diode region below the bottom of the trench, and forming a maximum of a doping concentration of the lower diode region distant to the bottom of the trench.

[0007] Those skilled in the art will recognize additional features and advantages upon reading the following detailed description, and upon viewing the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] Examples are explained below with reference to the drawings. The drawings serve to illustrate the basic principle, so that only aspects necessary for understanding the basic principle are illustrated. The drawings are not to scale. In the drawings the same reference characters denote like features.

[0009] FIG. **1** illustrates a vertical cross sectional view of a semiconductor device according to a first embodiment.

[0010] FIG. **2** illustrates a horizontal cross sectional view of one embodiment of the semiconductor device of FIG. **1**.

[0011] FIG. **3** illustrates a vertical cross sectional view of the semiconductor device of FIG. **2** in a section plane other than the section plane illustrated in FIG. **1**.

[0012] FIG. **4** illustrates one embodiment of a doping concentration of a diode region of the semiconductor device.

[0013] FIG. **5** illustrates one embodiment of a doping concentration of a channel region and drift region of the semiconductor device.

[0014] FIGS. **6**A to **6**J illustrate a method for producing a semiconductor device according to one embodiment.

[0015] FIGS. **7**A and **7**B illustrate one embodiment of a method for producing a semiconductor device structure illustrated in FIG. **6**B.

[0016] FIG. **8** illustrates a vertical cross sectional view of a semiconductor device according to another embodiment.

[0017] FIG. **9** illustrates a vertical cross sectional view of a semiconductor device according to yet another embodiment.

[0018] FIGS. **10**A to **10**D illustrate one embodiment of a method for producing a thicker gate dielectric at a bottom and, optional, one sidewall of a trench.

[0019] FIGS. **11**A to **11**D illustrate another embodiment of a method for producing a thicker gate dielectric at a bottom and, optional, one sidewall of a trench.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0020] In the following Detailed Description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part thereof, and in which is shown by way of illustration specific embodiments in which the invention may be practiced.

[0021] FIG. **1** illustrates a vertical cross sectional view of a semiconductor device, specifically of a vertical semiconductor device, and more specifically of a vertical transistor device with an integrated diode. The semiconductor device includes a semiconductor body **100** with a first surface **101**. Figure shows a section of the semiconductor device in a vertical section plane, which is a section plane perpendicular to the first surface. The semiconductor body **100** extends vertically, that is, in a direction perpendicular to the first surface **101**, and horizontally, that is, in directions parallel to the first surface **101**.

[0022] Referring to FIG. **1**, the semiconductor device includes at least one device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ integrated in the semiconductor body **100**. The device cell will also be referred to as transistor cell in the following. In FIG. **1**, two device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ are illustrated. However, the semiconductor device may include more than two device cells, such as several ten, several hundred, several thousand, several ten thousand, several hundred thousand, or even several million device cells integrated in one semiconductor body **100**.

[0023] In FIG. **1**, the two device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ are labeled with different reference characters, while like features of the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ are labeled with like reference characters. Referring to FIG. **1**, each transistor cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ includes a drift region **11**, a source region **12** and a body region **13**. The body region **13** is arranged between the source region **12** and the drift region **11**. Each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ further includes a diode region **30** and a pn junction formed between the diode region **30** and the drift region **11**. In the embodiment of FIG. **1**, the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ share the drift region **11**. That is, the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ have one drift region **11** in common.

[0024] Referring to FIG. **1**, each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ further includes a gate electrode **21** arranged in a trench and dielectrically insulated from the body region **13**, the diode region **30**, and the drift region **11** by a gate dielectric **22**. The trench with the gate electrode **21** of each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ has a first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$, a second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$, opposite the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ and a bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$. The body region **13** of each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ adjoins the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ of the corresponding trench, the diode region **30** adjoins the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ of the corresponding trench, and the pn junction between the drift region **11** and the diode region **30** adjoins the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the corresponding trench.

[0025] Referring to FIG. **1**, the diode region **30** of one device cell, such as device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$ extends from a first surface **101** of the semiconductor body **100** adjacent the source region **12** and the body region **13** of a neighboring device cell, such as device cell $\mathbf{10}_2$, into the drift region **11** where the pn junction is formed. An electrically insulating layer (insulation layer) **51** covers the first surface **101** and the gate electrodes **21**. The insulation layer **51** has contact openings **52** where the insulation layer **51** uncovers the diode regions **32** and the source regions **12** of the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$. A source electrode **41** is formed on the insulation layer **51** and in the contact openings **52**. The source electrode **41** is electrically insulated from the gate electrodes **21** by the insulation layer **51** and electrically connects the individual diode regions **30** and the individual source regions **12** to a source terminal S (only schematically illustrated in FIG. **1**) or forms the source terminal S. Optionally, the source electrode **41** includes a first source electrode layer $\mathbf{41}_1$ electrically contacting the diode regions **30** and the source regions **12**, and a second source electrode layer $\mathbf{41}_2$ electrically connecting the first source electrode layer $\mathbf{41}_1$. The second source electrode layer $\mathbf{41}_2$ is connected to the source terminal S or forms the source terminal S of the semiconductor device. The first electrode layer $\mathbf{41}_1$ includes, e.g., titanium (Ti), platinum (Pt), nickel alloys, or the like. The second electrode layer $\mathbf{41}_2$ includes, e.g., aluminum (Al), copper (Cu), or the like. In the embodiment shown in FIG. **1**, the source electrode **41** is a planar electrode which contacts the source region **12** and the diode region **30** at the first surface **101**. Optionally, the semiconductor body **100** includes a contact trench (not shown) which, from the first surface **101**, extends at least into the diode regions. In this embodiment, the source electrode **41** extends into the trench.

[0026] Referring to FIG. **1**, the semiconductor device further includes a drain region **14** adjoining the drift region **11**. Optionally, a field-stop region (not illustrated) of the same doping type as the drift region **11** but more highly doped in the drift region **11** is arranged between the drift region **11** and the drain region **14**. The drain region **14** is electrically connected to a drain terminal D (only schematically illustrated in FIG. **1**). The individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ share one drain region **14**. That is, there is one drain region **14** common to the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$.

[0027] The individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ are connected in parallel by having the source regions **12** connected to the source terminal S via the source electrode **41**, by sharing the drain region **14** and having the drain region **14** connected to the drain terminal D, and by having the gate electrodes **21** electrically connected to a common gate terminal G. The connection of the gate electrodes **21** to the gate terminal G is only schematically illustrated in FIG. **1**. One possible way to connect the gate electrodes **21** to the gate terminal G is explained with reference to FIGS. **2** and **3** herein below.

[0028] The semiconductor device shown in FIG. **1** is a MOS transistor device with an integrated diode. The transistor device can be implemented as an n-type device or as a p-type device. In an n-type device, the source regions and the drift region **11** are n-doped, while the body region **13** is p-doped. In a p-type device, the source regions **12** and the drift region **11** are p-doped, while the body regions **13** are n-doped. The transistor device can be implemented as an enhancement (normally-off) device or as a depletion (normally-on) device. In an enhancement device, the body regions **13** of the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ adjoin the gate dielectric **22**. In a depletion device there are channel regions **15** (illustrated in dashed lines in FIG. **1**) of the same doping type as the source regions **12** and the drift region **11** along the gate dielectric **22**. The channel region **15** of each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ extends from the corresponding source region **12** to the drift region **11** along the gate dielectric **22** and is depleted of charge carriers when the transistor device is switched off. Alternatively, the gate dielectric **22** includes fixed charges that cause the generation of a conducting channel in the body region **13** along the gate dielectric **22** when the gate drive voltage (gate-source voltage) is zero.

[0029] Further, the transistor device can be implemented as a MOSFET or as an IGBT. In a MOSFET, the drain region **14** has the same doping type as the source regions **12** and the drift region **11**, while in an IGBT the drain region **14** has a doping type complementary to the doping type of the source regions **12** and the drift region **11**. In an IGBT, the drain region **14** is also referred to as collector region.

[0030] The diode regions **30** have the same doping type as the body regions **13**, which is a doping type complementary to the doping type of the drift region **11**. Since the diode region **30** of one device cell, such as device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$ in FIG. **1**, adjoins the body region **13** of a neighboring device cell, such as device cell $\mathbf{10}_2$ in FIG. **1**, the body region **13** of each device cell is electrically connected to the source electrode **41** through the diode region **30** of a neighboring device cell. Optionally, each diode region **30** includes two differently doped semiconductor regions, namely a first region **31** adjoining the drift region **11** and forming the pn junction with the drift region **11**, and a second region **32** electrically connecting the first region **31** to the source electrode **41**. The second region **32**, which will also be referred to as contact region in the following, may have a higher doping concentration than the first region **31**. In the embodiment shown FIG. **1**, the contact region **32** of one device cell, such as device cell **101** in FIG. **1**, adjoins the second sidewall of the corresponding trench and electrically connects the body region **13** of the neighboring device cell, such as device cell $\mathbf{10}_2$ in FIG. **1**, to the source electrode **41**.

[0031] The diode region **30** of each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ forms a bipolar diode with the drift region **11** and the drain region **14**. A circuit symbol of this bipolar diode is also illustrated in FIG. **1** (the polarity of the circuit symbol illustrated in FIG. **1** relates to an n-type semiconductor device; in a p-type device the polarity is inverted). The diodes formed between the diode regions **30** of the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ and the drift region **11** are connected in parallel and are connected in parallel with a load path (drain-source path) of the MOS transistor. The drain-source path of the MOS transistor is an internal path between the drain terminal D and the source terminal S. The individual diodes are reverse biased (block) when a voltage with a first polarity is applied between the drain and source terminals D, S of the MOS transistor, and the individual diodes are forward biased (conduct) when a voltage with a second polarity is applied between the drain and source terminals D, S. In an n-type semiconductor device, the diodes are reverse biased when a positive voltage is applied between the drain and source terminals D, S, and the diodes are forward biased when a negative voltage is applied between the drain and source terminals D, S (which is a positive voltage between the source and drain terminals S, D). The individual diodes are parallel to the body diodes of the transistor cells. The body diodes are the diodes formed by the body regions **13** and the drift region **11** of the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$. However, unlike the body diodes, the properties of the diodes between the diode regions **30** and the drift region **11** can be adjusted widely independent of the properties of the MOS transistor. Specifically, the diodes between the diode regions **30** and the drift region **11** can be implemented to have a high current rating by implementing the diode region **30** such that the pn junction between the diode region **30** and the drift region **11** has a relatively large area.

[0032] The semiconductor device of FIG. **1** can be operated like a conventional MOS transistor by applying a load voltage between the drain and source terminals D, S and by applying a drive potential to the gate electrode G. One way of operation is briefly explained with reference to an n-type semiconductor device. This way of operation, however, also applies to a p-type device, where in a p-type device the polarities of the voltages explained in the following are inverted. The semiconductor device is in a forward operation mode when a load voltage is applied between the drain and source terminals D, S that reverse biases the body diodes and the additional diodes (the diodes between the diode regions **30** and the drift region **11**) of the individual device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$. This voltage is a positive voltage in an n-type device. In the forward operation mode, the MOS transistor can be switched on and off through the drive potential applied to the gate terminal G. The MOS transistor is switched on (in an on-state) when the drive potential applied to the gate terminal G generates conducting channels in the body regions **13** between the source regions **12** and the drift region **11**, and the MOS transistor is switched off (in an off-state) when the conducting channel in the body regions **13** are interrupted. The absolute value of the drive potential that switches on or switches off the transistor device is dependent on the specific type of the transistor device (enhancement device or depletion device).

[0033] The semiconductor device is in a reverse operation mode when a voltage is applied between the drain and source terminals D, S that forward biases the body diodes and the additional diodes. In this operation mode, the semiconductor device can only be controlled through the polarity of the load voltage, but not through the drive potential applied to the gate terminal G.

[0034] When the semiconductor device is in the forward operation mode and when the semiconductor device is switched off, the pn-junctions between the diode regions **30** and the drift region **11** and the pn-junctions between the body regions **13** and the drift region **11** are reverse biased so that a depletion region expands in the drift region **11** beginning at the pn-junctions. When the load voltage increases, the depletion region expands deeper into the drift region **11** in the direction of the drain region **14**. When the load voltage increases and the depletion region expands deeper into the drift region **11**, the electric field strength at the pn-junctions also increase. Since the pn-junctions between the body regions **13** and the first drift region **11** is close to the gate dielectric **22**, the gate dielectric **22** may be damaged when high load voltages are applied, that is when high field strengths occur. In the semiconductor device of FIG. **1**, however, the diode regions **30** of two neighboring device cells $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ together with the drift region **11** act as a JFET (Junction Field-Effect Transistor). This JFET has channel regions **111** between two neighboring diode regions **30**. As the load voltage increases and as the electrical potential of the drift region **11** increases, the JFET pinches off the channel regions **111** and prevents a field strength of an electric field at the pn-junctions between the body regions **13** and the drift region **11** to further increase when the load voltage further increases.

[0035] The load voltage at which the channels $\mathbf{11}_1$ of the JFET pinch off, is, for example, dependent on a distance between two neighboring diode regions **30** in a lateral direction of the semiconductor body **100**. The "lateral direction" of the semiconductor body **100** is perpendicular to the

vertical direction (in which the drain region **14** is spaced from the body regions **13** and the diode regions **30**) and is essentially parallel to the first surface **101**. This lateral distance between two neighboring diode regions **30** is, for example, between 0.5 μm (micrometers) and 2 μm (micrometers) or between 0.25 times and 1.5 times the width of the trenches accommodating the gate electrodes **21**. The "width" of the trenches is the distance between the first and second sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$. In case the trenches are tapered, as illustrated in the embodiment of FIG. **1**, the width is either the largest distance between the first and second sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ or the average of the width. According to another embodiment, the lateral distance between two neighboring diode regions **30** is between 30% and 60% of a dimension (width) of the diode regions **30** in the lateral direction in the drift region **11** below the trenches **110**. In case the diode regions have a varying width in the drift region **11**, the width is either the maximum width or the average width.

[0036] Each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ includes a channel region, which is a region of the body region **13** along the gate dielectric **22** or which is the optional channel region **15** (illustrated in dashed lines in FIG. **1**). The channel region along the gate dielectric **22** enables charge carriers to flow from the source regions **12** to the drift region **11** when the transistor device is in the on-state. The diode region **30** of each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ does not overlap the channel region. That is the pn junctions between the diode regions **30** and the drift region **11** adjoin the bottoms $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the individual gate trenches and do not extend beyond the gate trenches in the direction of the channel regions. Thus, the diode regions **30** do not constrain a charge carrier flow from the channel regions to the drain region **14**.

[0037] The voltage blocking capability of the semiconductor device is, inter alia, dependent on a distance between the diode regions **30** and the drain region **14**. This distance can be adjusted in the manufacturing process in accordance with the desired voltage blocking capability. As a rule of thumb, in a SiC semiconductor body **100**, the distance between the drain region **14** and diode region **30** is between 0.8 micrometers and 1.0 micrometers per 100V voltage blocking capability.

[0038] The semiconductor body **100** may include a conventional semiconductor material, in particular a wide bandgap semiconductor material, such as silicon carbide (SiC), or the like. The device topology illustrated in FIG. **1** is, in particular, suitable for semiconductor devices implemented with SiC technology. When, e.g., the semiconductor body **100** includes SiC, the gate dielectric **22** may be implemented as a silicon oxide (SiO_2). A gate dielectric **22** of SiO_2 may suffer from degradation when exposed to high field strengths that may occur in high voltage devices. In such devices, the JFET formed by the diode regions **30** and the drift region **11** efficiently protects the gate dielectric **22** when the semiconductor device is switched off and a high load voltage is applied between the drain and source terminals D, S. In the reverse operation mode, the additional diode that is directly connected to the source electrode **41** is a highly efficient diode with low losses connected in parallel to the load path of the MOS transistor.

[0039] The doping concentration of the drift region **11** is, for example, between 1E14 cm^{-3} and 1E17 cm^{-3}. The doping concentration of the body regions **13** is, for example, between 5E16 cm^{-3} and 5E17 cm^{-3}. The doping concentrations of the source and drain regions **12**, **14** are, for example, higher than 1E19 cm^{-3}. The doping concentration of the diode regions **30** is, for example, between 1E18 cm^{-3} and 1E19 cm^{-3}.

[0040] Referring to FIG. **1**, the body region **13** of each device cell $\mathbf{10}_1$, $\mathbf{10}_2$ adjoins the corresponding gate trench at the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$. Especially when the gate trenches have tapered sidewalls, the first and second sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ may correspond to different crystal planes of a crystal lattice of the semiconductor body **100**. According to one embodiment, the semiconductor body **100** includes a hexagonal SiC crystal and the gate trenches have tapered sidewalls, such that the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ corresponds to the 11-20-plane in the SiC crystal. In this case the individual channel regions feature a relatively low resistance. In this embodiment, the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ is aligned with the c-axis of the crystal of the SiC semiconductor body. The c-axis (hexagonal main axis) is perpendicular to the growth plane (0001-plane) of the SiC crystal. This growth plane is not illustrated in FIG. **1**. The bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench is essentially parallel to the first surface **101**.

[0041] An angle α (alpha) between the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ and the first surface **101** of the trench **110** is dependent on an orientation of the first surface relative to the growth plane (0001-plane). According to one embodiment, the first surface **101** is inclined relative to the growth plane, where an angle between the first surface **101** and the growth plane may be between 1° and 10°, in particular between 2° and 8°. In this case a is between 80° (90°−10°) and 89° (90°−1°), and in particular between 82° (90°−8°) and 88° (90°−2°). According to one specific embodiment, the angle between the first surface **101** and the growth plane is 4°, so that the angle α between the first surface **101** and the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ of the trench **110** is 86°. There is a high charge carrier mobility in the SiC crystal along the 11-20 plane (which may also be written as (1 1-2 0) plane) so that the alignment of the first sidewall to the c-axis results in a low resistance in the channel region along the gate dielectric **22** in the body region **13**.

[0042] The gate trenches can be elongated trenches, wherein the gate electrodes **21** can be connected to a gate terminal electrode at positions that are out of view in the vertical cross sectional view of FIG. **1**. FIG. **2** shows a horizontal cross sectional view of one embodiment of the semiconductor device of FIG. **1** that includes elongated gate trenches. FIG. **2** illustrates features of the semiconductor device in three different horizontal layers of the semiconductor body **100**. In FIG. **2**, the gate electrodes **21** and the gate dielectrics **22** are illustrated in dotted lines. As can be seen from FIG. **2**, the gate trenches with the gate electrodes **21** and the gate dielectric **22** are elongated trenches. The source regions **12** and the diode regions **30** with the optional contact regions **32** run parallel to the gate trenches. FIG. **2** further illustrates (in dashed lines) contact openings **52**, **53** of the insulation layer **51**. Referring to FIG. **2**, there are first contact openings **52** above the source regions **12** and the diode regions **30**, specifically the contact regions **32** of the diode regions, and second contact openings **52** above the gate electrodes **21**. The second openings **53** are spaced apart from the first openings **52** in a first lateral direction x of the semiconductor body **100**. The individual gate trenches and the individual diode regions **30** are spaced in a second lateral direction y that is perpendicular to the first lateral direction x, in the present embodiment. Referring to FIGS. **1** and **2**, the source electrode **41** covers the insulation layer **51** in

those regions where the first contact openings **52** are located and is electrically connected to the contact regions **32** and the source regions **12** in the first contact openings **52**.

[0043] A gate connection electrode (gate runner) **42** is spaced apart from the source electrode **41** in the first lateral direction x and covers the insulation layer **51** in those regions where the second contact openings **52** are arranged. The gate connection electrode **42** is electrically connected to the gate electrodes **21** in the second contact openings **53**. Referring to FIG. **2**, the source electrode **41** and the gate connection electrode **42** may be essentially parallel.

[0044] The vertical cross sectional view illustrated in FIG. **1** corresponds to a vertical cross sectional view in section plane A-A illustrated in FIG. **2**. FIG. **3** illustrates a vertical cross sectional view in section plane B-B illustrated in FIG. **2**, where section plane B-B cuts through the gate connection electrode **42** and the second contact openings **53**. Referring to FIG. **3**, the insulation layer **51** separates the diode regions **30** and the source regions **12** from the gate connection electrode **42**, and the gate connection electrode **42** is electrically connected to the gate electrodes **21** through the second contact openings **53**.

[0045] According to one embodiment, the semiconductor device includes one source electrode **41** connected to the source terminal S, and one gate connection electrode **42** connected to the gate terminal G. According to a further embodiment (not illustrated), the semiconductor device includes several gate connection electrodes **42** each connected to the gate terminal G, and several source electrodes **41** each connected to the source terminal S where the gate connection electrodes **42** and the source electrodes **41** are essentially parallel and are arranged alternatingly in the first lateral direction x.

[0046] Referring to FIGS. **1** and **2**, the diode region **30** includes a region which, in the vertical direction of the semiconductor body **100**, is located below the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench. The "vertical direction" of the semiconductor body **100** is the direction perpendicular to the first surface **101** of the semiconductor body **100**. This region of the diode region **30** below the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ will be referred to as "lower diode region" in the following. In an embodiment, in which the diode region **30** includes a first diode region **31** and a second diode region **32**, the lower diode region may include sections of the first diode region **31** and the second diode region **32**.

[0047] According to one embodiment, the lower diode region, in the vertical direction, has a varying doping concentration such that a region, where the lower diode region has a maximum doping concentration is spaced apart from the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench. This is explained with reference to FIG. **4** below.

[0048] FIG. **4** illustrates the doping concentration N_{30} of the diode region **30** along a line I-I shown in FIG. **1**. In FIG. **4**, x represents the distance between the first surface **101** and the individual positions for which the doping concentrations are illustrated in FIG. **4**. x**0** denotes the position of the first surface **101**, and x**1** denotes the position of the trench bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$, and x**2** denotes a lower end of the diode region **30** where the diode region **30** forms the pn-junction with the drift region. In FIG. **4**, only the doping concentration of the dopants forming the diode region **30** are illustrated. As stated above, these dopants are p-type dopants in an n-type transistor device, and an n-type dopants in a p-type transistor device. Referring to FIG. **4**, the doping concentration of the diode region **30** has a maximum in the lower diode region **30** at a position spaced apart from the trench bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$. A shortest distance d between trench bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ and the position x**3** of the maximum is, for example, between 200 nanometers (nm) and 1 micrometer (μm), in particular, between 250 nanometers and 500 nanometers. According to one embodiment, this maximum doping concentration in the lower diode region is between 1E18 cm^{-3} and 5E18 cm^{-3}.

[0049] Referring to FIG. **4**, the maximum of the doping concentration in the lower diode region may be a local maximum of the overall diode region **30**. That is, the diode region may include an absolute maximum of the doping concentration or further local maximums of the doping concentration region which are outside the lower diode region and higher than the maximum doping concentration in the lower diode region **30**. In the embodiment shown in FIG. **4**, the diode region **30** has an absolute maximum of the doping concentration close to the first surface **101**. This region which has the absolute maximum the doping concentration serves as a contact region in which the source electrode **1** electrically connects to the diode region **30**. The maximum doping concentration in this region is, for example, between 1E19 cm^{-3} and 1E20 cm^{-3}. According to one embodiment, there is a (local) minimum of the doping concentration between the trench bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ and the position x**3** with the (local) maximum doping concentration. This minimum doping concentration, according to one embodiment, is in a region adjacent the trench bottom. According to one embodiment, this minimum doping concentration is between 5E17 cm^{-3} and 1E18 cm^{-3}.

[0050] Implementing the diode region **30** with a local maximum of the doping concentration of the lower diode region spaced apart from the trench bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ helps to effectively protect the gate dielectric **22** from high electric fields when the semiconductor device is blocking.

[0051] According to one embodiment, the drift region **11** has a locally increased doping concentration in the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$. This is explained with reference to FIG. **5** below. FIG. **5** shows the doping concentration along a line II-II shown in FIG. **1**. In FIG. **5**, the doping concentrations N_{12} of the source region **12**, N_{13} of the body region **13**, and N_{11} of the drift region **11** are illustrated. As in FIG. **4**, x**0** denotes the position of the first surface **101**, x**1** denotes the position of the trench bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$, and x**2** denotes a position of the lower end of the diode region **30**. Referring to FIG. **5**, the drift region **11**, in a region adjoining the body region **13** has a higher doping concentration than in regions farther down the drift region **11** in the direction of the drain region **14**. That is, the drift region **11** has a maximum of the doping concentration in a region between the pn-junction at the border between the body region **13** and the drift region **11** and a vertical position corresponding to the vertical position of the lower end of the diode region **30**. A length of this region with an increased doping concentration is, for example, between 200 nanometers and 1 micrometer. The doping concentration in this region is, for example, at least 2 times the doping concentration outside the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$. According to one embodiment, the doping concentration in the higher doped section of the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$ is between 5E16 cm^{-3} and 1E17 cm^{-3}. Outside the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$, the doping concentration of the drift region **11** is, for example, below 2E16 cm^{-3}. The higher doping of the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$ helps to reduce the on-resistance of the semiconductor device, which is the electrical resistance in

the on-state of the semiconductor device. According to one embodiment, the higher doped section of the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$ covers the vertical position x**3** where the lower diode region has the doping maximum.

[0052] According to another embodiment, the drift region **11** includes a further higher doped region $\mathbf{11}_2$ below the diode region **30**. This further higher doped region $\mathbf{11}_2$ may adjoin the diode region **30** and, in a lateral direction may extend beyond the diode region **30** in the direction of the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$. The doping concentration of this further higher doped region $\mathbf{11}_2$ may correspond to the doping concentration of the higher doped region in the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$. This further higher doped region $\mathbf{11}_2$ may be spaced apart from the higher doped region in the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$.

[0053] One embodiment of a method for producing a semiconductor device as explained herein before is explained with reference to FIGS. **6**A to **6**J in the following. Each of these figures shows a vertical cross sectional view of the semiconductor body **100** during individual method steps of the method.

[0054] Referring to FIG. **6**A, the method includes providing a semiconductor body **100** with a drift region layer **111**, a body region layer **113** adjoining the drift region layer **111**, and a source region layer **112** adjoining the body region layer **113**. The source region layer **112** forms a first surface **101** of the semiconductor body **100**. The semiconductor body **100** further includes a drain region layer **114** adjoining the drift region layer **111** opposite the body region layer **113**. Optionally, a field stop region layer (not illustrated) of the same doping type as the drift region layer **111**, but more highly doped than the drift region layer **111** is arranged between the drain layer region **114** and the drift region layer **111**. The drift region layer **111** forms the drift region **11**, the body region layer **113** forms the body regions **13**, the source region layer **113** forms the source regions **12**, and the drain region layer **114** forms the drains region **14** of the finished semiconductor device. The doping types and the doping concentrations of the individual semiconductor layers **111**-**114** corresponds to the doping types and doping concentrations of the device regions formed by the individual semiconductor layers. These doping types and the doping concentrations of the individual device regions have been explained herein before.

[0055] The semiconductor body **100** of FIG. **6**A can be produced using conventional techniques for producing a semiconductor body having several differently doped semiconductor layers. According to one embodiment, producing the semiconductor body **100** includes providing a semiconductor substrate that forms the drain region layer **114**, growing the drift region layer **111** as a first epitaxial layer on the drain region layer **114**, growing the body region layer **113** as second epitaxial layer on the drift region layer **111**, and growing the source region layer **112** as a third epitaxial layer on the body region layer **113**. The individual epitaxial layers can be in-situ doped during the individual epitaxial processes.

[0056] According to a second embodiment, a semiconductor substrate is provided that has a doping concentration corresponding to the doping concentration of the drift region layer **111**. By implantation processes doping atoms are implanted through the first surface **101** into this substrate, so as to form the body region layer **113** and the source region layer **112**. Additionally, doping atoms are implanted into the substrate through a second surface **102** opposite the first surface **101** in order to form the drain region layer **114**.

[0057] According to a third embodiment, a semiconductor substrate is provided that forms the drain region layer **114**. An epitaxial layer is grown on the drain region layer **114**, where the epitaxial layer has a doping concentration corresponding to the doping concentration of the drift region layer **111**. This epitaxial layer forms the first surface **101** of the semiconductor body **100**. Finally, doping atoms are implanted through the first surface **101** into the epitaxial layer, so as to form the body region layer **113** and the source region layer **112**.

[0058] Referring to FIG. **6**B, diode regions **30** that are spaced in the second lateral direction y of the semiconductor body **100** are formed. Forming the diode regions **30** may include forming a first diode region **31** in the drift region layer **111**, and forming a second diode region (contact region) **32**, where the contact region **32** extends from the first surface **111** through the source region layer **112** and the body region layer **113** into the first diode region **31**. Forming the first and second diode regions **31**, **32** may include conventional implantation processes. An embodiment of a method for producing the diode regions **30** is explained with reference to FIGS. **7**A and **7**B herein further below.

[0059] Referring to FIG. **6**C, the method further includes producing trenches in the first surface **101** of the semiconductor body **100**. The trenches each include a first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$, a second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ opposite the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$, and a bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$. The trenches subdivide the body region layer **113** and the source region layer **112** into several sections, wherein those regions that have the doping concentration of the body region layer **113** before forming the diode regions **30** form body regions **13**, and those regions that have the doping concentration of the source region layer **112** before forming the diode region **30** form source regions **12** of the semiconductor device. Referring to FIG. **6**C, the trenches **110** are formed such that the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ of each trench **110** adjoins one source region **12** and one body region **13** and that the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ of each trench **110** adjoins one diode region **30**, specifically the contact region **32** of the diode region **30**. In this case, a pn junction formed between the diode region **30** and the drift region **11** adjoins the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of each trench **110**. Forming the trenches **110** may include conventional etching processes using an etch mask **210**.

[0060] Optionally, there is a post processing of the trenches **110** in which corners between the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ and the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the individual trenches are rounded. The result of such a rounding process is illustrated in FIG. **6**D. The rounding process may include a thermal treatment in a hydrogen containing atmosphere. A temperature in this thermal treatment is, for example, between 1200° C. and 1700° C., the duration is, for example, between 1 minute and 60 minutes. According to one embodiment, the corners between the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ and the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ are formed with radius that is at least two times the thickness or at least four times the thickness the gate dielectric **22** has along the first surface $\mathbf{110}_1$. The gate dielectric **22** is formed in process steps explained below. According to one embodiment, a radius of the corners is at least 300 nanometers (nm). This process not only rounds the corners at the bottom of the trench, but also the corners between the first surface **101** and the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$.

[0061] According to one embodiment, the trenches **110** are formed with tapered sidewalls. According to one embodiment, the semiconductor body **100** includes SiC, and the trenches **110** are formed with tapered sidewalls such that the first sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$ are aligned with the c-axis of the SiC semiconductor crystal.

[0062] Forming the trenches with tapered sidewalls may include an etching process which etches the semiconductor body in the vertical direction at a first etch rate and in the lateral direction at a second etch rate lower than the first etch rate. As the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{100}_2$ of the trench closer to the first surface **101** are subject to the etching agent longer than sections closer to the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$, the trench becomes wider at the first surface **101** than at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$. Dependent on the accuracy of the etching process, dependent on how exactly the first surface **101** of the semiconductor body **100** is aligned with a desired crystal plane, and dependent on how exactly the semiconductor body **100** is aligned with an etching mask (not shown) in the etching process the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ may or may not exactly fit the crystal plane in which the channel region is desired to be implemented.

[0063] According to one embodiment, forming the trenches includes an adjustment process which serves to align the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ with the above mentioned crystal plane, that is, the 11-20 plane. This process, after forming the trenches, may include a thermal treatment in a hydrogen containing atmosphere. In the thermal treatment, a temperature is, for example, between 1200° C. and 1700° C., and the duration is, for example, between 1 minute and 60 minutes. According to one embodiment, the same thermal treatment is used for rounding the corners of the trenches and for fine tuning the alignment of the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$.

[0064] In next process steps illustrated in FIG. **6**E, the gate dielectric **22** is formed on the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ and the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trenches **110**. Optionally, the gate dielectric **22** is also formed on the first surface **101** of the semiconductor body **100**. According to one embodiment, the semiconductor body **100** includes SiC, and the gate dielectric **22** includes silicon dioxide (SiO_2). Forming the gate dielectric **22** may include an oxidation process, a deposition process, or a combination of a deposition process and an oxidation process

[0065] Referring to FIG. **6**F, an electrode layer **21'** is formed in the trenches **110** and above the first surface **101** of the semiconductor body **100**. Those sections of the electrode layer **21'** that are located in the trenches **110** form the gate electrodes **21** of the individual device cells. For example, the electrode layer **21'** includes a highly doped polycrystalline semiconductor material, such as polysilicon, or a silicide.

[0066] Referring to FIG. **6**G, the electrode layer **21'** is removed from the first surface **101** but remains in the trenches where it forms the gate electrodes **21**. Removing the electrode layer **21'** above the first surface **101** may include an etching process such as a dry etching process.

[0067] Referring to FIG. **6**H, the insulation layer **51** is formed above the first surface **101** and the gate electrodes **21**. The insulation layer **42** may be a conventional electrically insulating layer, such as an oxide. Forming the insulation layer **51** may include a chemical vapor deposition (CVD).

[0068] Referring to FIG. **6**I, contact holes **52** are formed in the insulation layer **51**. Forming the contact holes may include conventional etching processes using etch masks. FIG. **6**I illustrates forming the first contact holes **52** above the diode regions **30** and the source regions **12**. Equivalently, the second contact holes **53** are formed above the gate electrode **21** in regions that are out of view in the vertical cross section of FIG. **6**I.

[0069] Finally, the source electrode **41** is formed. The source electrode **41** electrically contacts the diode regions **30** and the source regions **12** in the first contact openings **43**. Optionally, the source electrode **41** includes the two sublayers $\mathbf{41}_1$, $\mathbf{41}_2$ explained before. Forming the source electrode **41** may include a metal deposition process, such as one of a CVD process, an evaporation process, a galvanic process and a sputter process. The source electrode **41** includes an electrically conductive material, such as a metal or a silicide. Equivalently, the gate connection electrode **42** is formed in regions that are out of view in FIG. **6**J and contacts the gate electrodes **21** in the second contact openings **53**.

[0070] In the method explained before, the vertical position x**3** (see, FIG. **4**) and the doping concentration of the doping maximum in the lower diode region **30** can be adjusted in the implantation process explained with reference to FIG. **6**B. In particular, the vertical position can be adjusted by adjusting the implantation energy of those ions that are implanted to form the doping maximum, and the doping concentration can be adjusted by adjusting the implantation dose. It should be noted that forming one diode region **30** may include several implantation processes which may be different in view of implantation energy and implantation dose so as to form a diode region **30** with doping concentration that varies in the vertical direction of the semiconductor body.

[0071] FIGS. **7**A and **7**B illustrate one embodiment of a method for producing the diode regions **30**. In the method shown in FIGS. **7**A and **7**B, the diode regions **30** are formed with a first diode region **31** and a second diode region **32**. Referring to FIG. **7**A, forming the first diode region **31** may include at least one implantation process using an implantation mask **210**. The implantation energy of this implantation process is adjusted such that the doping atoms are implanted into the drift region layer **111**.

[0072] Referring to FIG. **7**B, forming the second diode regions (contact regions) **32** includes at least one further implantation process using a further implantation mask. The further implantation mask can be obtained by forming spacers **220** along sidewalls of the openings of the first implantation mask **210**. Forming the contact region **32** may include several subsequent implantation processes with different implantation energies. Further, each implantation process, also the implantation processes explained with reference to FIGS. **6**A to **6**J before, include a thermal treatment for activating the implanted doping atoms.

[0073] The implantation energies and the implantation doses in the at least one implantation process and the at least one further implantation process are selected such that the lower diode region of the finished device has a maximum of the doping concentration at the desired vertical position x**3** (see, FIG. **4**). According to one embodiment, the position and the doping concentration of the maximum are defined in the process which forms the first diode region **31**. According to another embodiment, both the process for forming the first diode region **31**, and the process form forming the second diode region **32** define the position and the doping concentration of the doping maximum.

[0074] In the embodiment shown in FIGS. **7**A-**7**B, the second diode region **32** extends deep (more than 50% of a vertical dimension of the first diode region **31**) into the first diode region **31**. However, this is only an example. According to another embodiment, the second diode region **32** extends less than 50%, or even less than 25% of the vertical dimension of the first diode region **31** into the first diode region **31**.

[0075] Further, forming the first diode region **31** and the second diode region **32** with different lateral dimensions, that is, using two different implantation masks for forming these first and second diode regions **31**, **32** is optional. According to one embodiment, only one mask, such as the mask **210** shown in FIG. **7**A is used for forming both, the first diode region **31** in the drift region **11**, and the second diode region **32** connecting the first diode region **31** to the source electrode in the finished device.

[0076] Referring to FIG. **5**, the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$ may have a region with a higher doping concentration than other sections of the drift region **11**. The higher doping concentration of the channel region can be obtained by implanting dopant atoms via the first surface **101** into the semiconductor body **100**. An implantation mask may be used in order to implant the dopant atoms only in those regions where the finished device includes the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$. The vertical position of the channel region $\mathbf{11}_1$ section with the higher doping concentration and the doping concentration can be adjusted by suitably adjusting the implantation energy and implantation dose in this process. The further higher doped region $\mathbf{11}_2$ (see, FIG. **1**) can be produced by implanting doping atoms into the semiconductor body **100** via the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench after the process steps explained with reference to FIG. **6**D above.

[0077] FIG. **8** illustrates a vertical cross sectional view of a semiconductor device according to another embodiment. In this embodiment, the gate dielectric **22** is thicker at the trench bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ than at the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$. That is, the gate dielectric **22** has a first thickness at the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ and a second thickness at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$, wherein the second thickness is greater than the first thickness. According to one embodiment, the second thickness is at least 1.5 times the first thickness, at least 2 times the first thickness, or even at least 3 times the first thickness. Due to variations or imperfections in the manufacturing process, the thickness of the gate dielectric **22** may vary along the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ and the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$. Thus, the "thickness" of the gate dielectric **22** at one of the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ or the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$, respectively, is understood as the average thickness or the minimum thickness of the gate dielectric **22** at the respective sidewall/bottom.

[0078] According to another embodiment shown in FIG. **9**, the gate dielectric **22** not only at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench, but also at the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ is thicker than at the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$. That is, the gate dielectric **22** has a third thickness at the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_3$ which is greater than the first thickness at the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$. According to one embodiment, the third thickness is at least 1.5 times the first thickness, at least 2 times the first thickness, or even at least 3 times the first thickness. The third thickness may substantially be equal the second thickness at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$, or may be different from the second thickness. According to one embodiment, the first thickness is between 40 nanometers and 100 nanometers. The second thickness and the third thickness, respectively, are, for example, between 60 nanometers and 300 nanometers.

[0079] FIGS. **10**A-**10**D illustrate one embodiment of a method for producing a thicker gate dielectric **22** on the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ and, optionally, the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ of the trench **110**. FIGS. **10**A-**10**C show a vertical cross sectional view of the semiconductor body **100** during/after different process sequences of the method. The method explained with reference to FIG. **10**A-**10**C begins after forming the trench **110** in the semiconductor body **100**, that is, after the process sequence explained with reference to FIGS. **6**A-**6**D before.

[0080] Referring to FIG. **10**A, the method includes forming a first dielectric layer **221** on the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ and the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench **110**. Optionally, this dielectric layer **221** is also formed on the first surface **101**. The first dielectric layer **221** may include an oxide. Forming this first dielectric layer **221** may include an oxidation process, a deposition process, or a combination of an oxidation process and a deposition process. For example, the deposition process includes a CVD (Chemical Vapor Deposition) process.

[0081] Referring to FIG. **10**B, the method further includes filling the trench **110** with a first protection layer **301**. For example, the protection layer **301** includes a polycrystalline or amorphous semiconductor material such as, for example, polysilicon or amorphous silicon. Optionally, a second protection layer **302** is formed above the first protection layer **301** and the first surface **101** such that the second protection layer **302** is arranged above that section of the first dielectric layer **221** which covers the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$. The second protection layer **302** is optional and can be omitted in those embodiments in which a thicker gate dielectric **22** is only to be produced at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$. The second protection layer **302** may include a polycrystalline or amorphous semiconductor material, a photoresist, or the like.

[0082] The method further includes etching the first dielectric layer **221** selectively against the semiconductor body **100**, the first protection layer **301**, and the optional second protection layer **302**. In this process, the first protection layer **201** protects the first dielectric layer **221** at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ from being etched, while the first dielectric layer **221** on the first surface **101** and along the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ can be etched. If the second protection layer **302** is omitted, the first dielectric layer **221** along the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ is also etched, so that, after the etching process, only the first dielectric layer **221** at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ remains. In case there is the second protection layer **302** above the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$, not only the first dielectric layer **221** at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ remains, but also the first dielectric layer **221** along the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ remains.

[0083] FIG. **10**C shows the semiconductor body **100** after these process steps, and after removing the first protection layer **301** and the optional second protection layer **302**. In FIG. **10**C, the first dielectric layer **221** along the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ is illustrated in dashed lines, as this part of first dielectric layer **221** is optional and only remains if the second protection layer **302** is produced.

[0084] Referring to FIG. **10**D, the method further includes forming a second dielectric layer **222** on the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ and the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench **110**. In the trench **110**, this second dielectric layer **222** adds to the first dielectric layer **221**. The first dielectric layer **221** and the second dielectric layer **222** form the gate dielectric **22**. The gate dielectric **22** is thicker at the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ where only

the second dielectric layer **222** is produced, is thicker at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ where the first dielectric layer **221** and the second dielectric layer **222** are produced, and may be thicker at the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$, where the second dielectric layer **222** and, optionally, the first dielectric layer **221** is produced. The further method steps for producing the semiconductor device may correspond to the method steps explained with reference to FIGS. **6**F-**6**J before.

[0085] FIGS. **11**A-**11**D illustrate a method for forming the gate dielectric **22** according to another embodiment. Referring to FIG. **11**A the method includes forming a first dielectric layer **221** on the sidewalls $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_2$ and the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench **110**. The first dielectric layer **221** may be produced as explained with reference to FIG. **10**A before.

[0086] The method further includes removing the first dielectric layer **221** at least along the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$. Optionally, the first dielectric layer **221** is also removed along the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$. Removing the first dielectric layer **221** along the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ may include forming a mask layer on the first dielectric layer **221** above the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ and, optionally, above the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$.

[0087] Referring to FIG. **11**B, forming this mask layer may include forming a sacrificial layer **224** above the first dielectric layer **221**. According to one embodiment, this sacrificial layer **224** includes a polycrystalline semiconductor material such as, for example, polysilicon. Referring to FIG. **11**B, this sacrificial layer **224** is subject to a damage implantation in those regions where it is desired to remove the sacrificial layer **224**. Referring to FIG. **11**B, the sacrificial layer **224** along the first surface **101** and along the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$ may be subject to damage implantation. A tilted implantation may be used in order to protect the sacrificial layer **224** at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ and at the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ from being implanted. Examples of ions used in the damage implantation process include noble gas ions such as, for example, argon or xenon ions.

[0088] In next process steps, those sections of the sacrificial layer **224** which were damage implanted are removed in an etching process which selectively etches damaged sacrificial layer sections against none-damaged sacrificial layer section. FIG. **11**C shows the sacrificial layer **224** after this selective etching process. The remaining sections of the sacrificial layer **224** are than used as an etch mask for etching those sections of the first dielectric layer **221** which are not covered by the sacrificial layer **224**. The result of this is illustrated in FIG. **11**D.

[0089] Referring to FIG. **11**D, the first dielectric layer **221** remains at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ and the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ of the trench **110**. This structure corresponds to the structure explained with reference to FIG. **10**C. Thus, the further process steps for forming the gate dielectric **22** may correspond to the process steps explained with reference to FIG. **10**D before.

[0090] Based on the method explained with reference to FIG. **11**A-**11**D a thicker gate dielectric **22** is formed on the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ and on the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$, as the first dielectric layer **221** in this method remains on the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ and the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$. However, this method can easily be modified to form the first dielectric layer **221** only on the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench **110**. The modified method includes a further damage implantation process which is selected such that the sacrificial layer **224** is damage implanted not only above the first sidewall $\mathbf{110}_1$, but also above the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$. A tilted implantation employing an implantation angle may be used that is different from the implantation angle in the method shown in FIG. **11**B. Let, for example, β (beta) be the implantation angle relative to the first surface **101** in the method shown in FIG. **11**B, then the implantation angle additionally used in the modified method is—β (illustrated in dotted lines in FIG. **11**B).

[0091] However, the sacrificial layer **224** at the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ is not damage implanted in the modified method. If the sacrificial layer **224** is damage implanted above the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$ the etching process explained with reference to FIG. **11**C etches the sacrificial layer **224** also above the second sidewall $\mathbf{110}_2$, so that the sacrificial layer **224** remains as a mask layer only above the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$. Consequently, the etching process which etches the first dielectric layer **221** leaves the first dielectric layer **221** only on the bottom $\mathbf{110}_3$ of the trench **110**.

[0092] It is to be understood that the features of the various embodiments described herein may be combined with each other, unless specifically noted otherwise.

[0093] As used herein, the terms "having", "containing", "including", "comprising" and the like are open ended terms that indicate the presence of stated elements or features, but do not preclude additional elements or features. The articles "a", "an" and "the" are intended to include the plural as well as the singular, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

[0094] With the above range of variations and applications in mind, it should be understood that the present invention is not limited by the foregoing description, nor is it limited by the accompanying drawings. Instead, the present invention is limited only by the following claims and their legal equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. A semiconductor device, comprising:

a semiconductor body;

a gate trench formed in the semiconductor body and having a first sidewall, a second sidewall opposite the first sidewall, and a bottom;

a source region and a drift region of a first conductivity type formed in the semiconductor body;

a body region of a second conductivity type arranged between the source region and the drift region and adjoining the first sidewall of the gate trench; and

a diode region of the second conductivity type adjoining the second sidewall of the gate trench,

wherein a pn junction is formed between the diode region and the drift region and adjoins the bottom of the gate trench,

wherein a lateral distance between the diode region and a neighboring diode region is between 30% and 60% of a dimension of the diode regions.

2. The semiconductor device of claim **1**, wherein the dimension of the diode regions is a width of the diode regions in a lateral direction in the drift region below the gate trench.

3. The semiconductor device of claim **2**, wherein the width of the diode regions varies in the drift region, and wherein the lateral distance between the diode region and the neighboring diode region is between 30% and 60% of the maximum width of the diode regions in the lateral direction in the drift region below the gate trench.

4. The semiconductor device of claim 2, wherein the width of the diode regions varies in the drift region, and wherein the lateral distance between the diode region and the neighboring diode region is between 30% and 60% of the average width of the diode regions in the lateral direction in the drift region below the gate trench.

5. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein a gate dielectric in the gate trench has a first thickness at the first sidewall, a second thickness at the second sidewall and a third thickness at the bottom, and wherein the second thickness is greater than the first thickness and/or the third thickness is greater than the first thickness.

6. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the gate trench has a rounded corner between the first sidewall and the bottom, and wherein a radius of the rounded corner is at least 2 times a thickness of a gate dielectric at the first sidewall.

7. The semiconductor device of claim 1, further comprising:

a source electrode electrically connected to the source region and the diode region.

8. The semiconductor device of claim 7, wherein the diode region comprises:

a first diode region forming the pn-junction with the drift region; and

a second diode region more highly doped than the first diode region and connected to the source electrode.

9. The semiconductor device of claim 8, wherein the second diode region adjoins the second sidewall of the gate trench.

10. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the semiconductor body comprises a SiC crystal, and wherein the first sidewall of the gate trench is aligned with a c-axis of the SiC crystal.

11. The semiconductor device of claim 10, wherein the gate trench is formed in a first surface of the semiconductor body, and wherein an angle between the first surface of the semiconductor body and the first sidewall of the gate trench is between 80° and 89°.

12. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the semiconductor device is a depletion device, and wherein the body region includes a channel region which extends between the source region and the drift region along the first sidewall of the gate trench, and wherein the pn junction formed between the diode region and the drift region does not extend beyond the gate trench in a direction of the channel region.

13. A semiconductor device, comprising:

a semiconductor body having a first surface;

a gate trench extending from the first surface into the semiconductor body and having a first sidewall, a second sidewall opposite the first sidewall, and a bottom;

a source region and a drift region of a first conductivity type formed in the semiconductor body;

a body region of a second conductivity type arranged between the source region and the drift region and adjoining the first sidewall of the gate trench;

a diode region of the second conductivity type below the body region and forming a pn junction with the drift region; and

a contact trench extending from the first surface into the diode region.

14. The semiconductor device of claim 13, wherein a gate dielectric in the gate trench has a first thickness at the first sidewall, a second thickness at the second sidewall and a third thickness at the bottom, and wherein the second thickness is greater than the first thickness and/or the third thickness is greater than the first thickness.

15. The semiconductor device of claim 13, further comprising:

a source electrode electrically connected to the source region and the diode region,

wherein the source electrode extends into the contact trench.

16. The semiconductor device of claim 13, wherein the semiconductor body comprises a SiC crystal, and wherein the first sidewall of the gate trench is aligned with a c-axis of the SiC crystal.

17. A semiconductor device, comprising:

a SiC body having a first surface;

a gate trench extending from the first surface into the SiC body and having a first sidewall, a second sidewall opposite the first sidewall, and a bottom;

a source region of a first conductivity type formed in the SiC body and adjoining the first sidewall of the gate trench;

a drift region of the first conductivity type formed in the SiC body below the source region;

a body region of a second conductivity type formed in the SiC body between the source region and the drift region and adjoining the first sidewall of the gate trench; and

a diode region of the second conductivity type formed in the SiC body and adjoining the second sidewall and the bottom of the gate trench but not the first sidewall of the gate trench.

18. The semiconductor device of claim 17, wherein the diode region comprises a first region of the second conductivity type adjoining the bottom of the gate trench and forming a pn junction with the drift region, and a second region of the second conductivity type adjoining the second sidewall of the gate trench.

19. The semiconductor device of claim 18, wherein the second region of the diode region has a higher doping concentration than the first region of the diode region.

20. The semiconductor device of claim 18, further comprising:

a source electrode connected to the source region and the second region of the diode region.

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