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Laven et al.

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(54) **SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICE WITH CONTROL STRUCTURE INCLUDING BURIED PORTIONS AND METHOD OF MANUFACTURING**

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H01L 29/66 (2006.01)
H01L 29/423 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **H01L 29/7813** (2013.01); **H01L 29/4236** (2013.01); **H01L 29/66734** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC H01L 29/7397; H01L 29/7813; H01L 29/4236; H01L 29/66734
See application file for complete search history.

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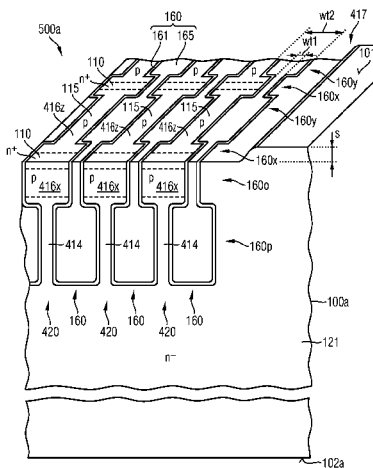
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A semiconductor device includes transistor cells with source zones of a first conductivity type and body zones of a second conductivity type. The source and body zones are formed in a semiconductor mesa formed from a portion of a semiconductor body. Control structures include first portions extending into the semiconductor body on at least two opposing sides of the semiconductor mesa, second portions in a distance to the first surface between the first portions, and third portions in a distance to the first surface and connecting the first and the second portions, wherein constricted sections of the semiconductor mesa are formed between neighboring third portions.

14 Claims, 38 Drawing Sheets



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FIG 1A

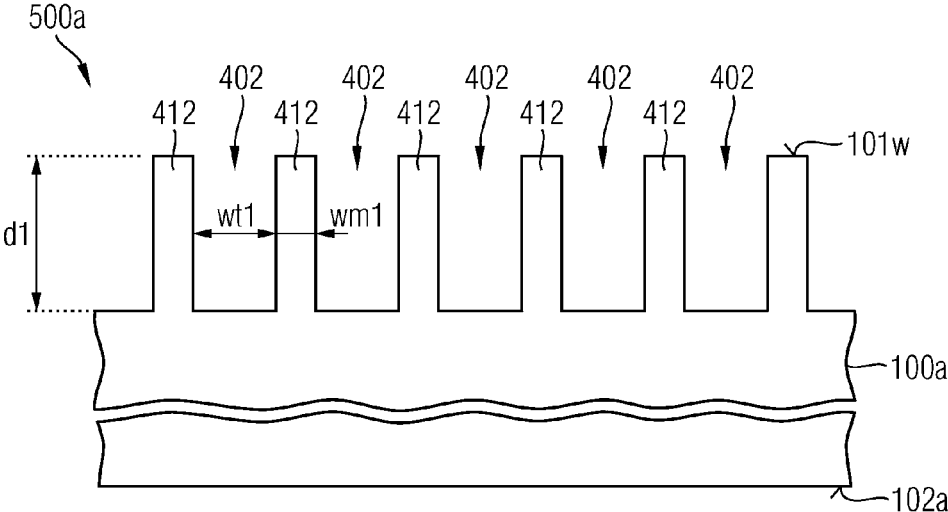


FIG 1B

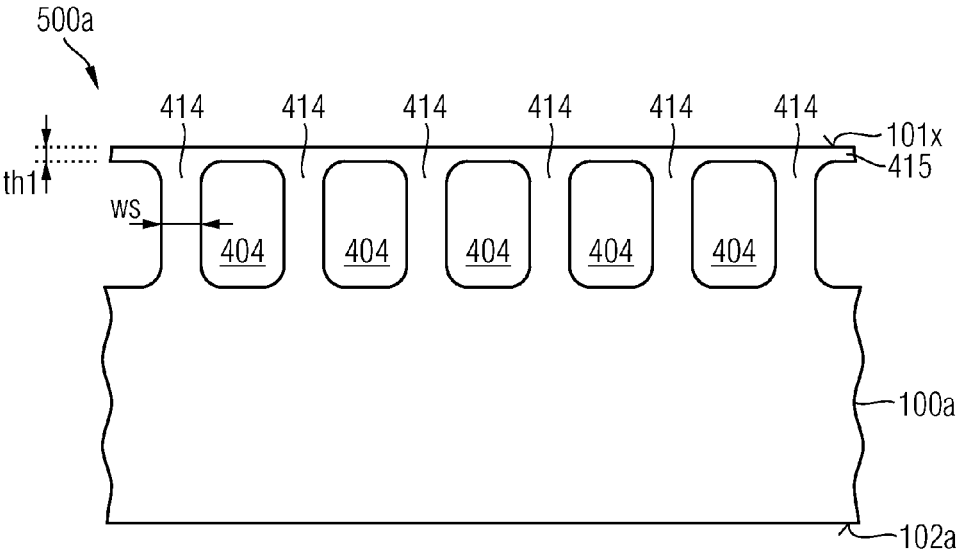


FIG 1C

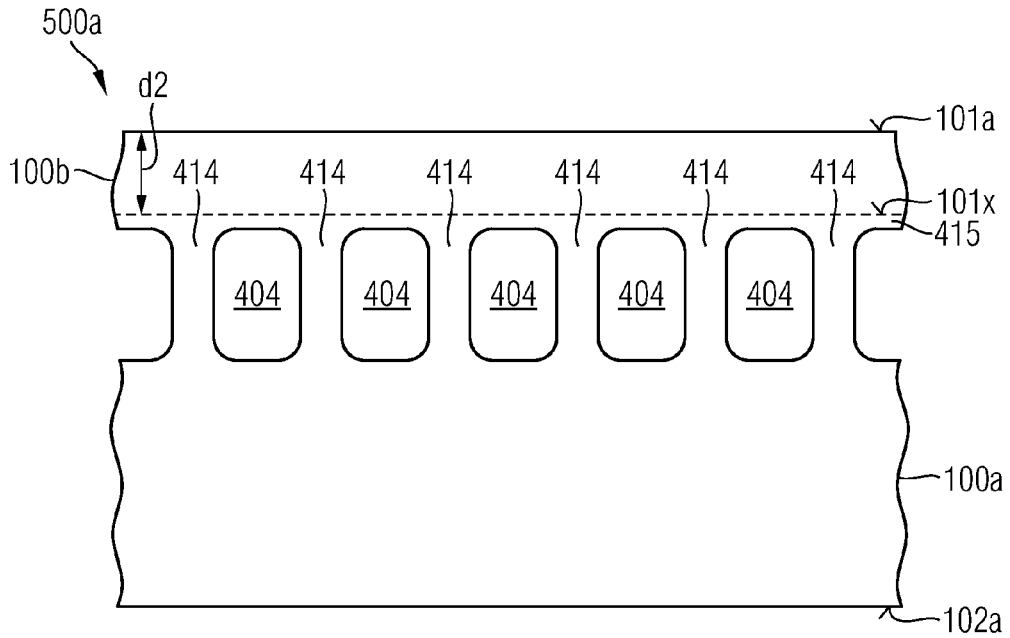


FIG 1D

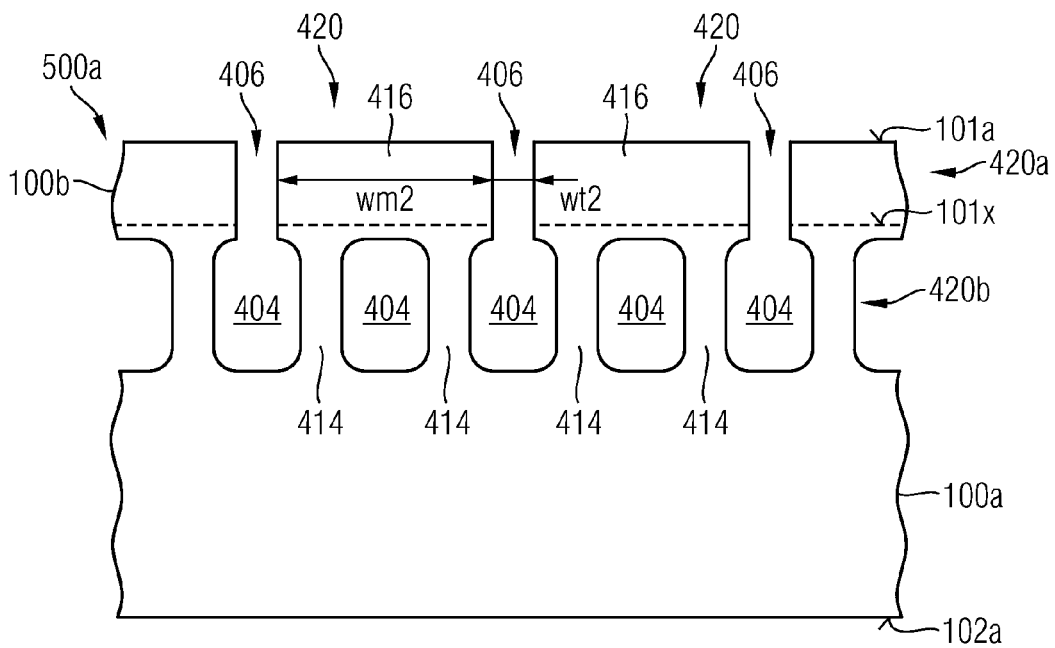


FIG 1E

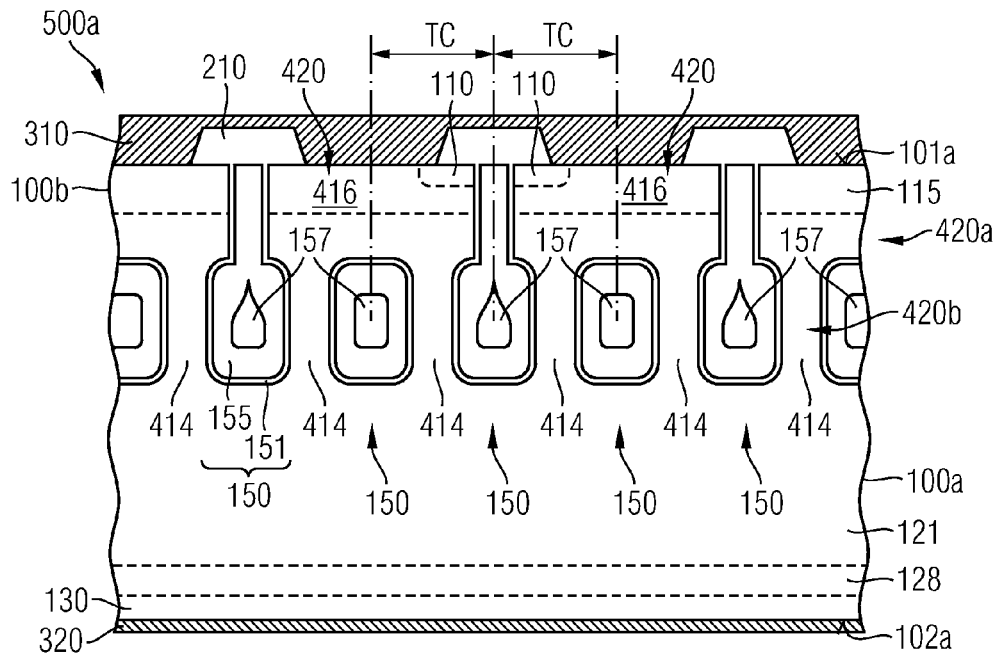


FIG 2A

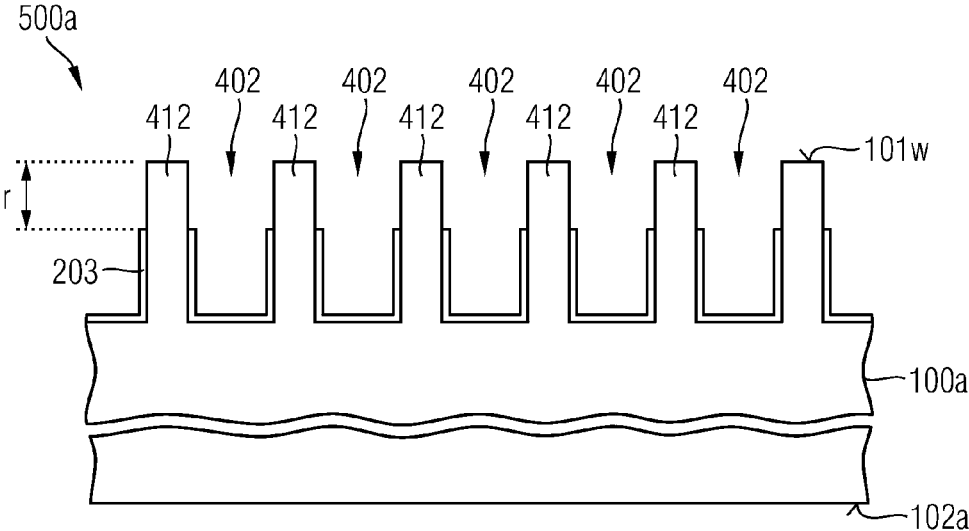


FIG 2B

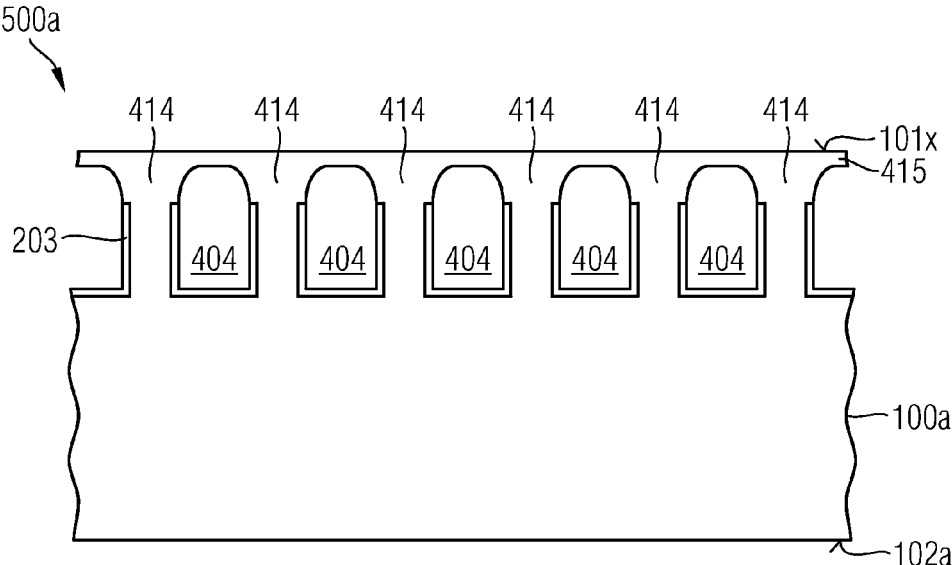


FIG 3A

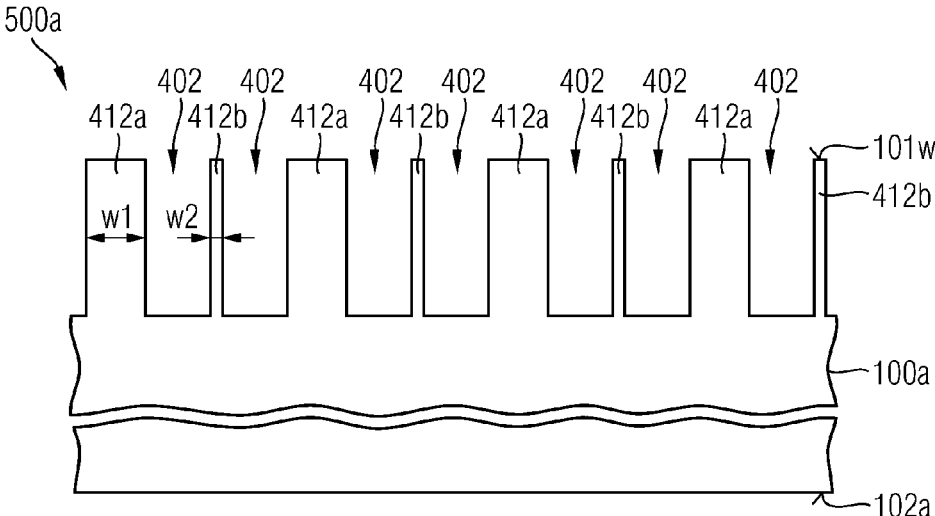


FIG 3B

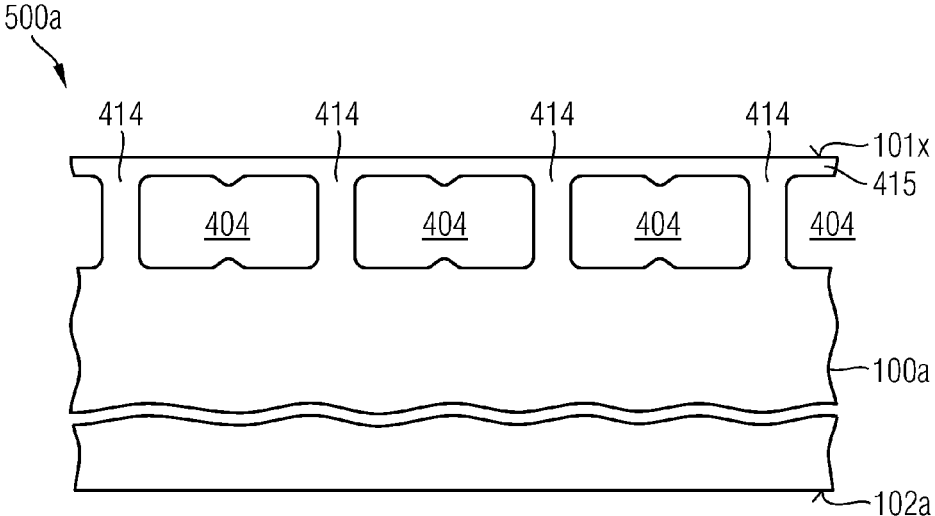


FIG 3C

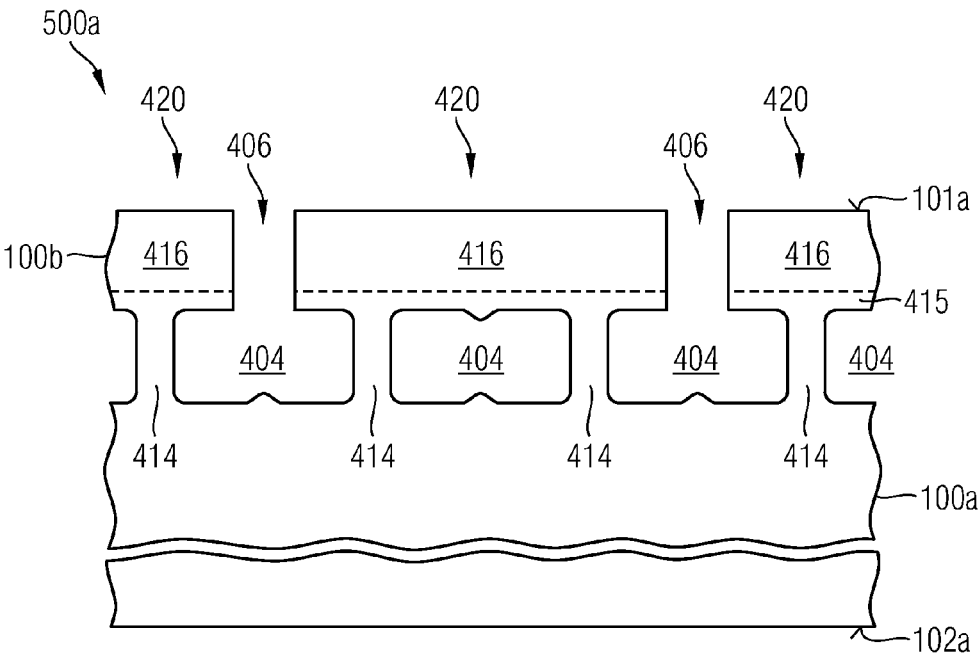


FIG 4A

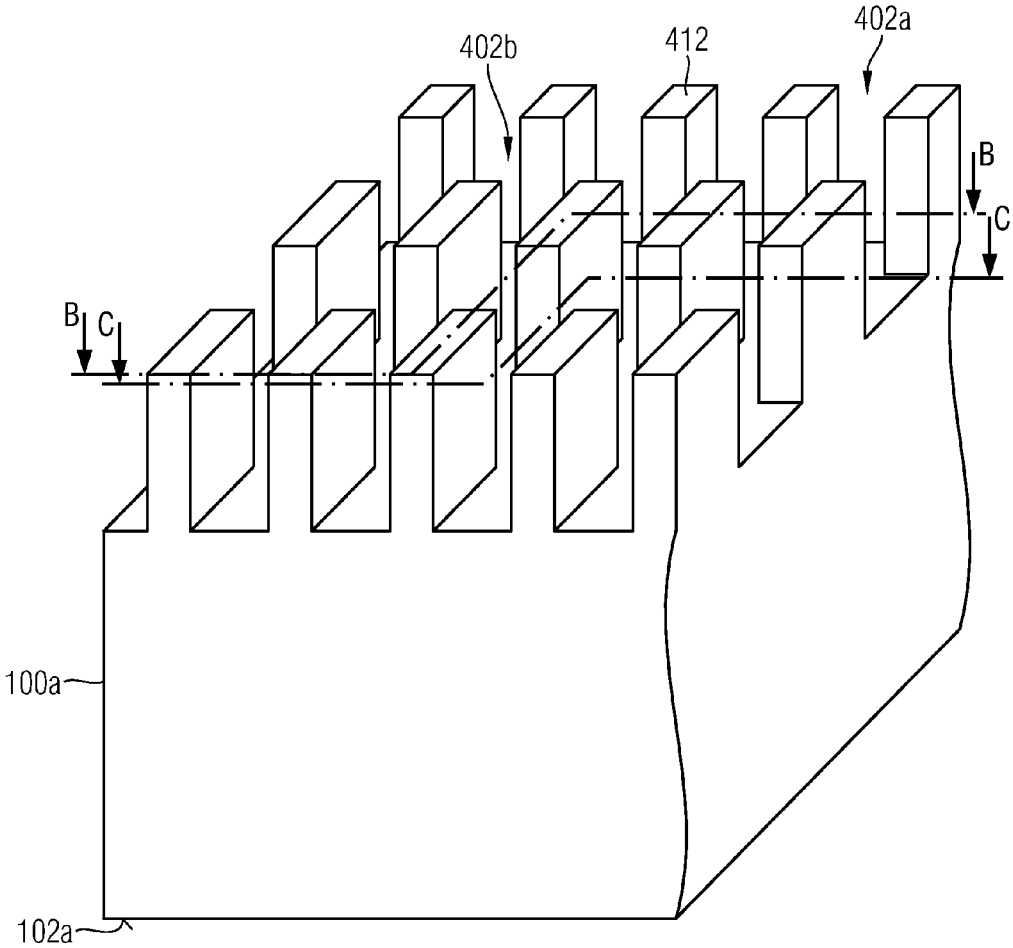


FIG 4B

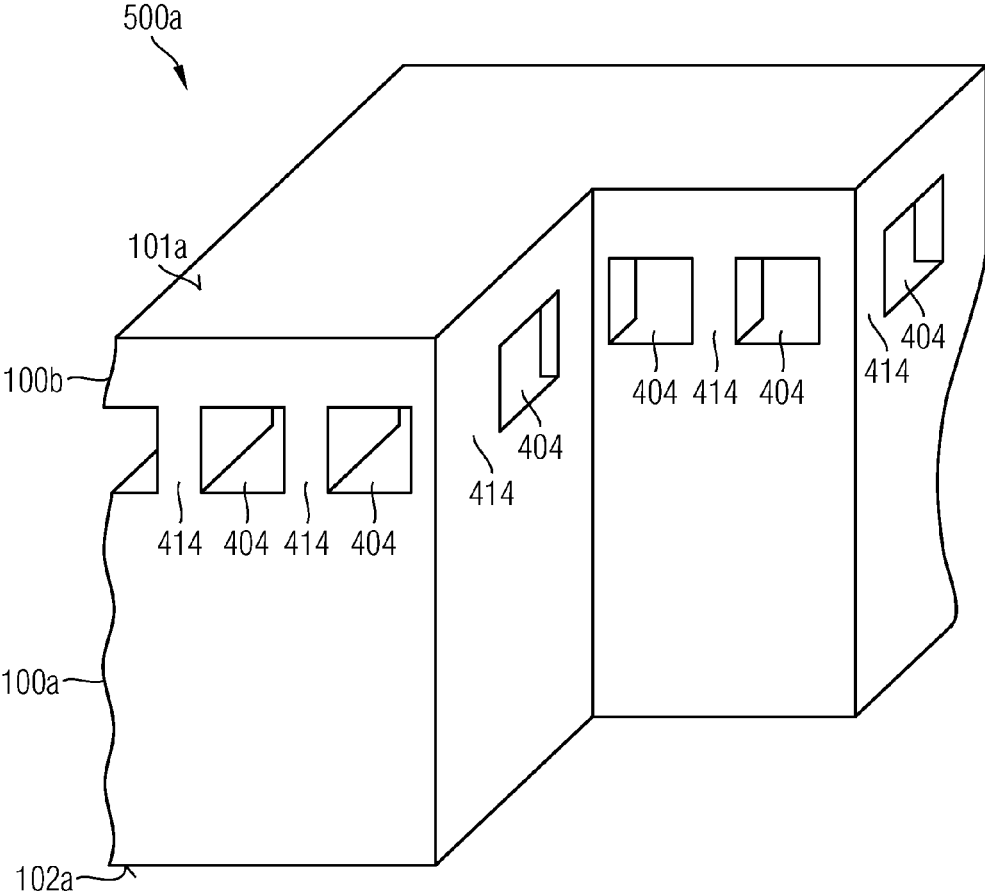


FIG 4C

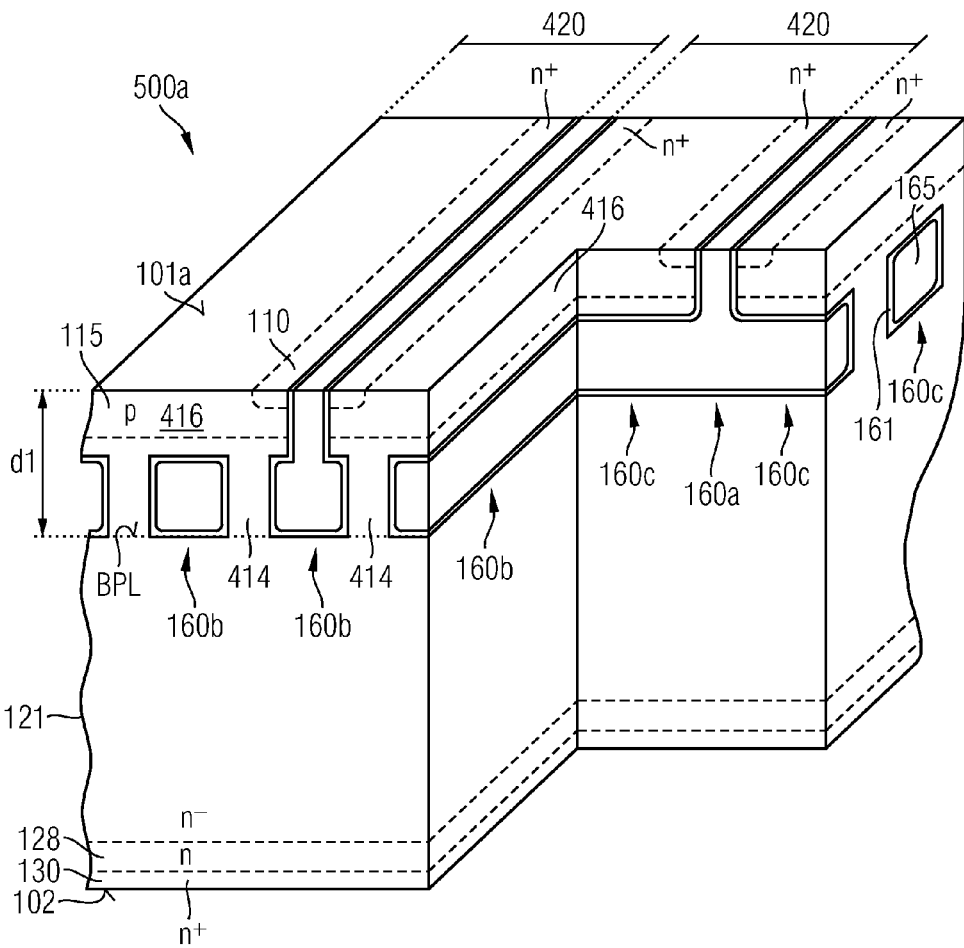


FIG 5A

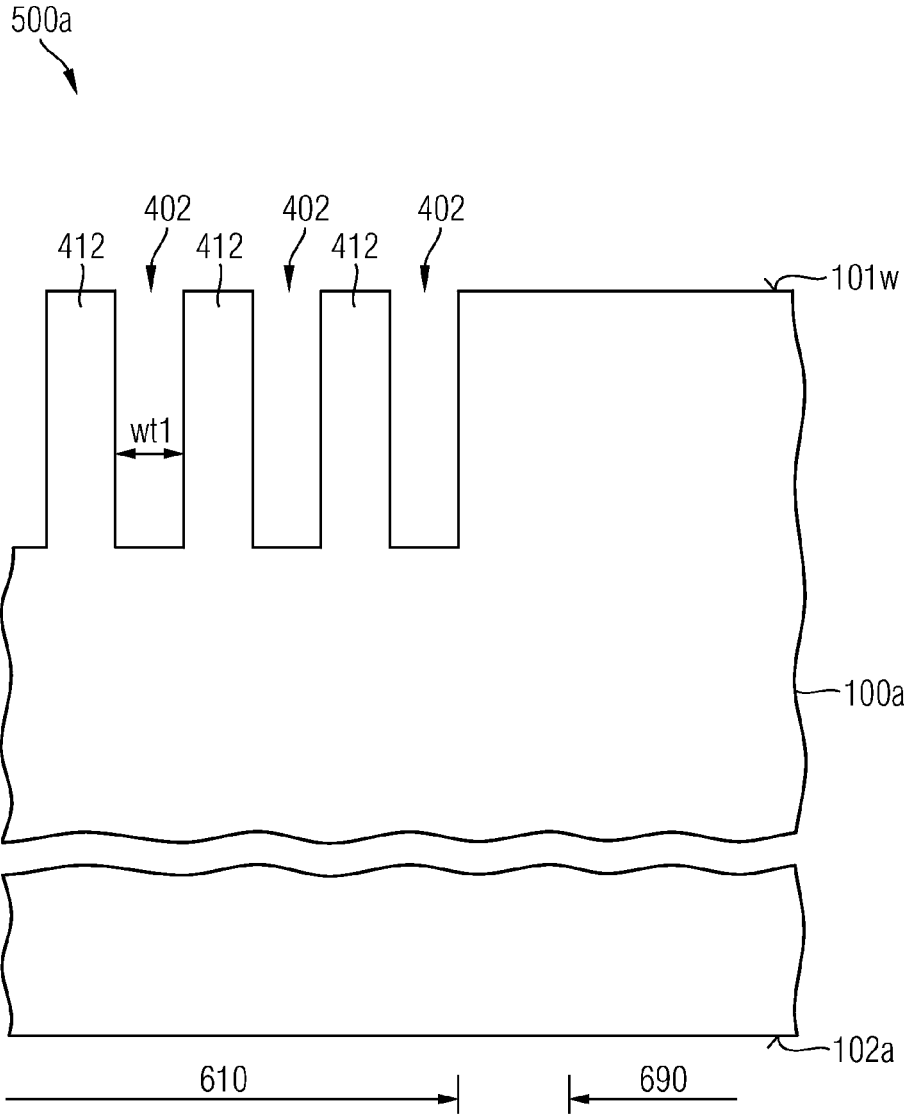


FIG 5B

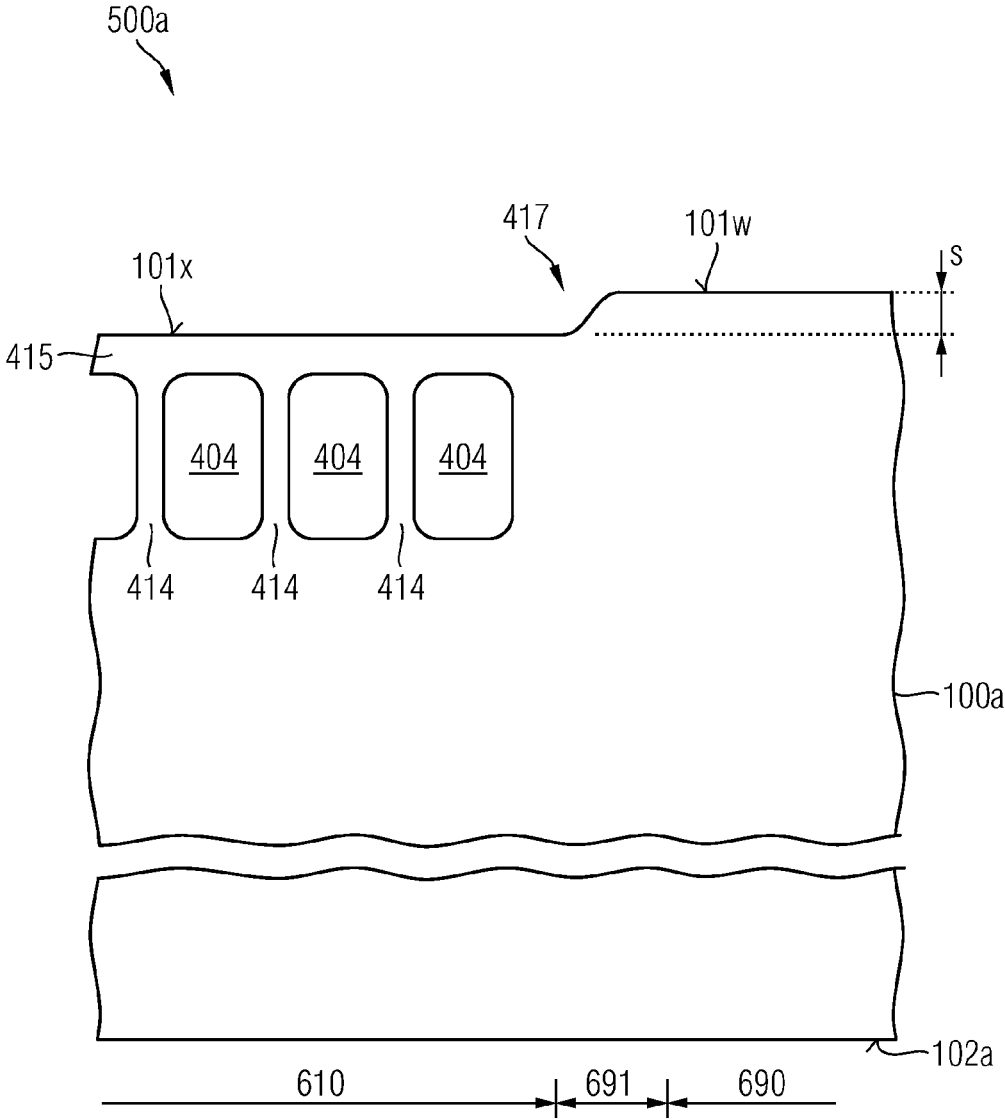


FIG 5C

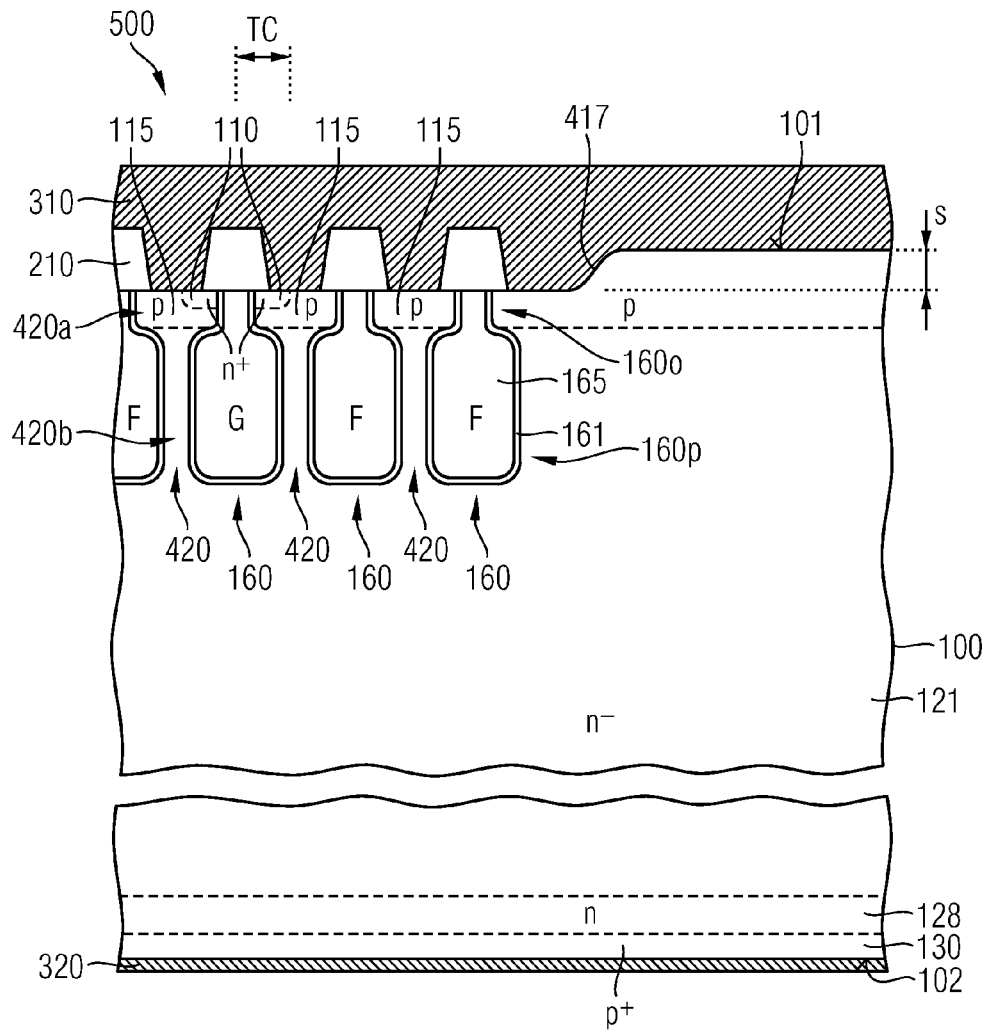


FIG 6A

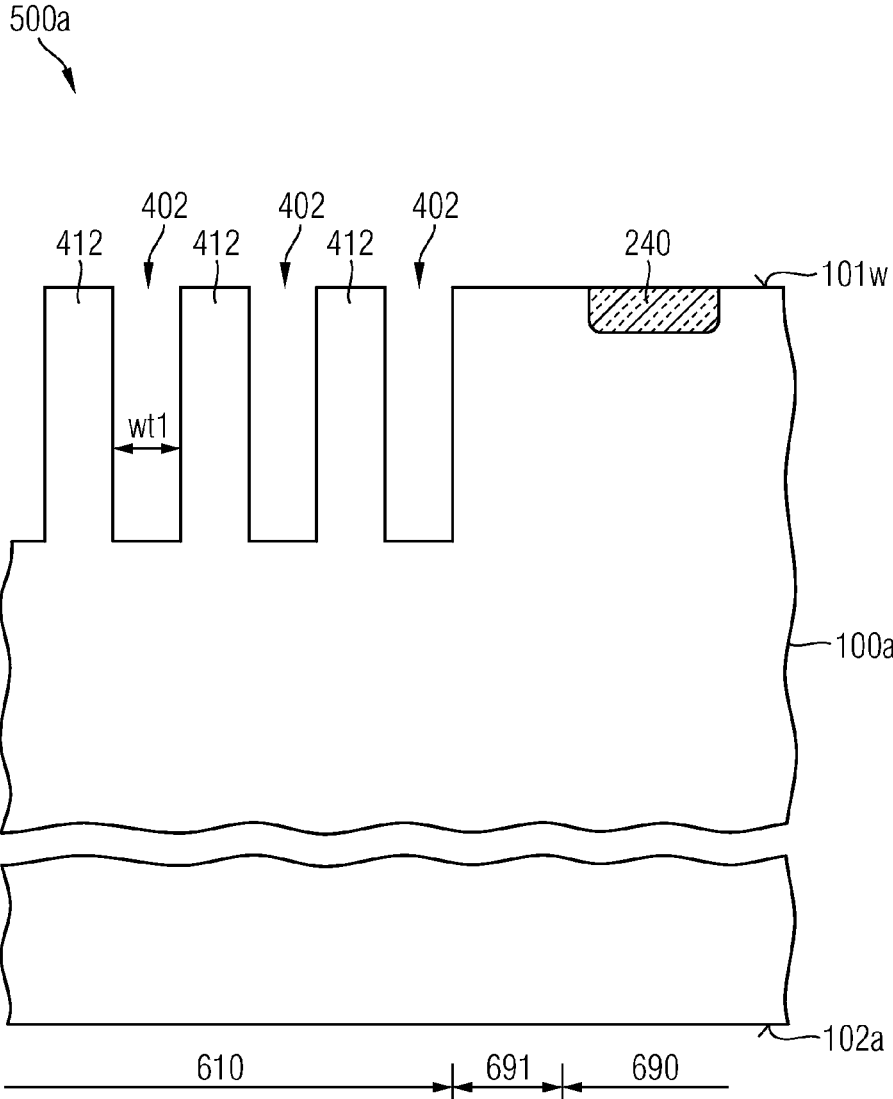


FIG 6B

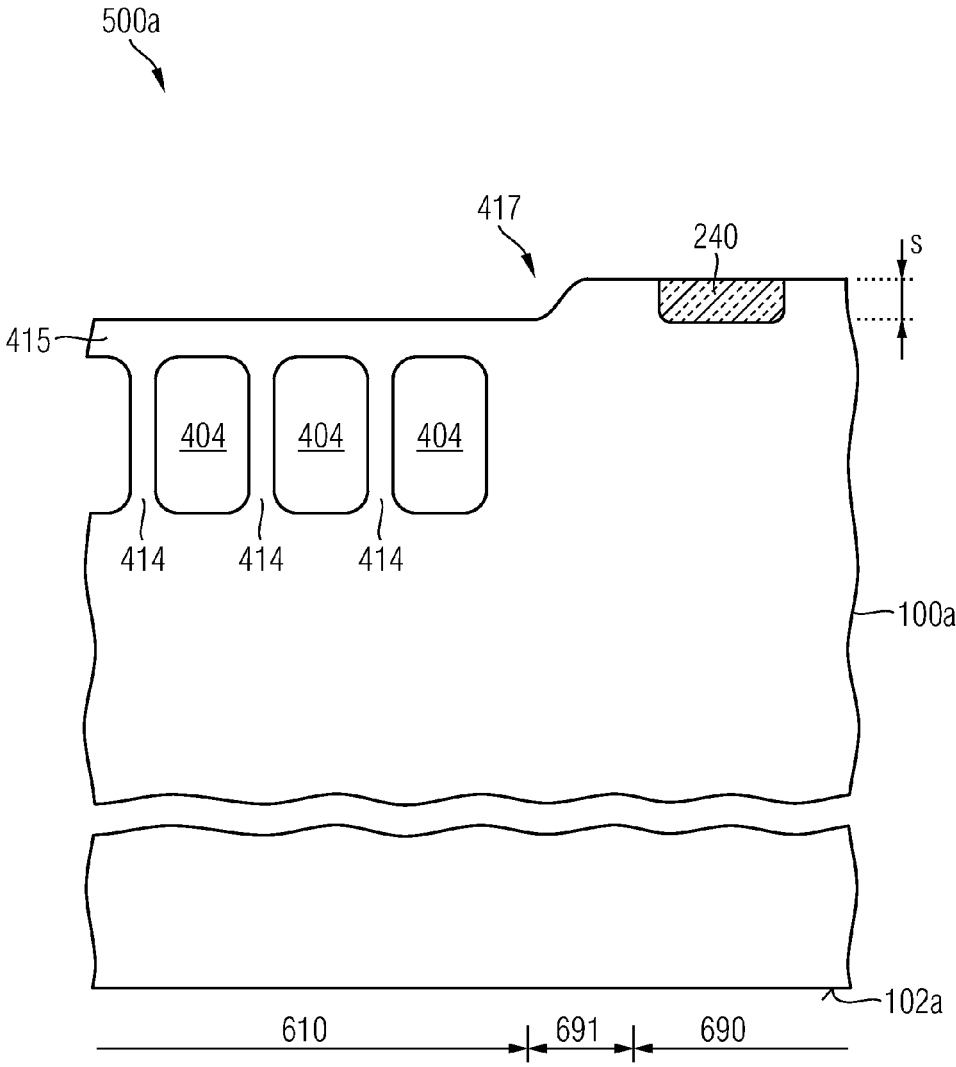


FIG 6C

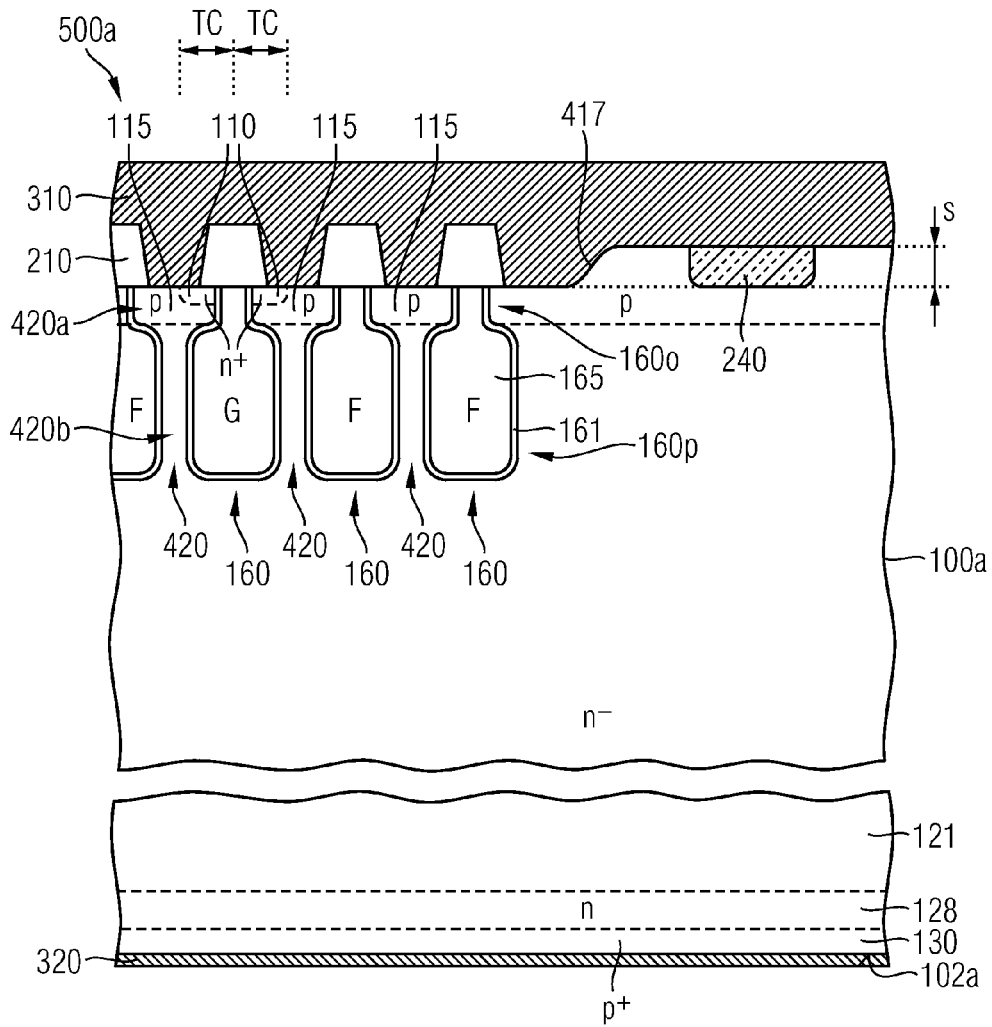


FIG 7A

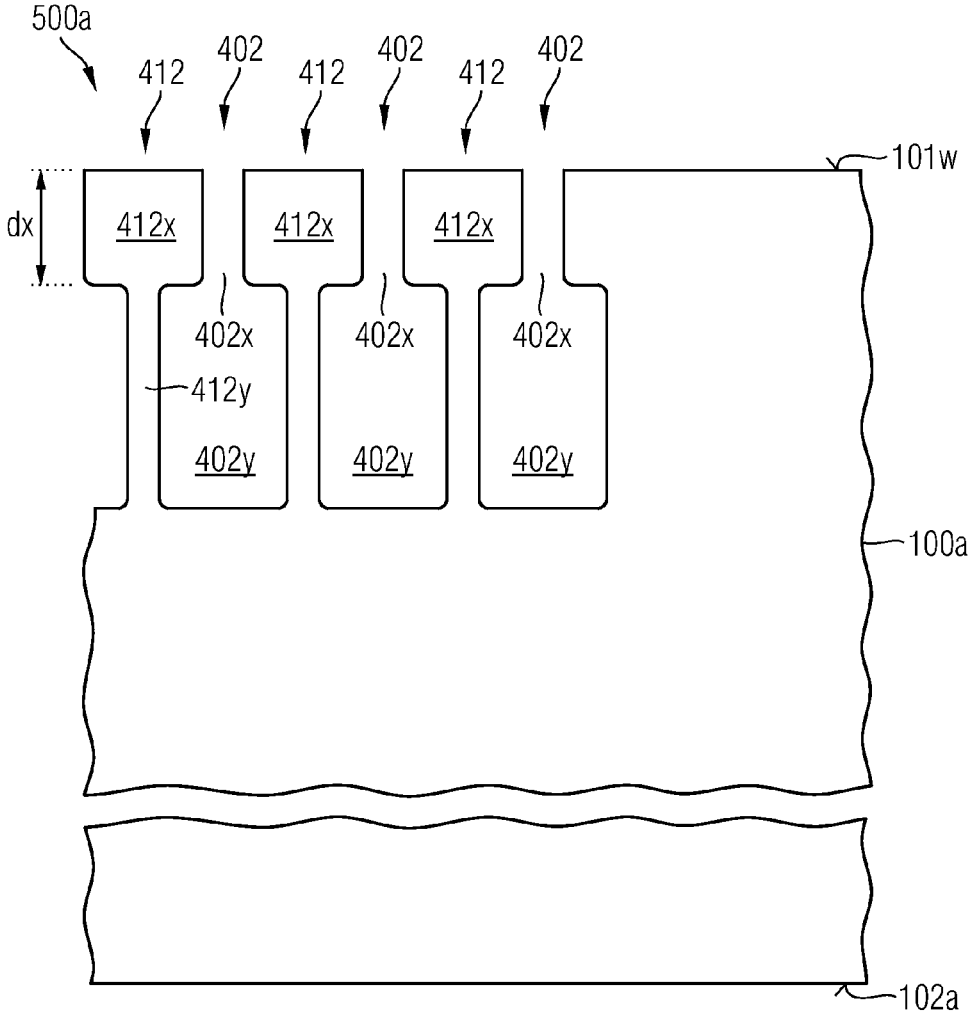


FIG 7B

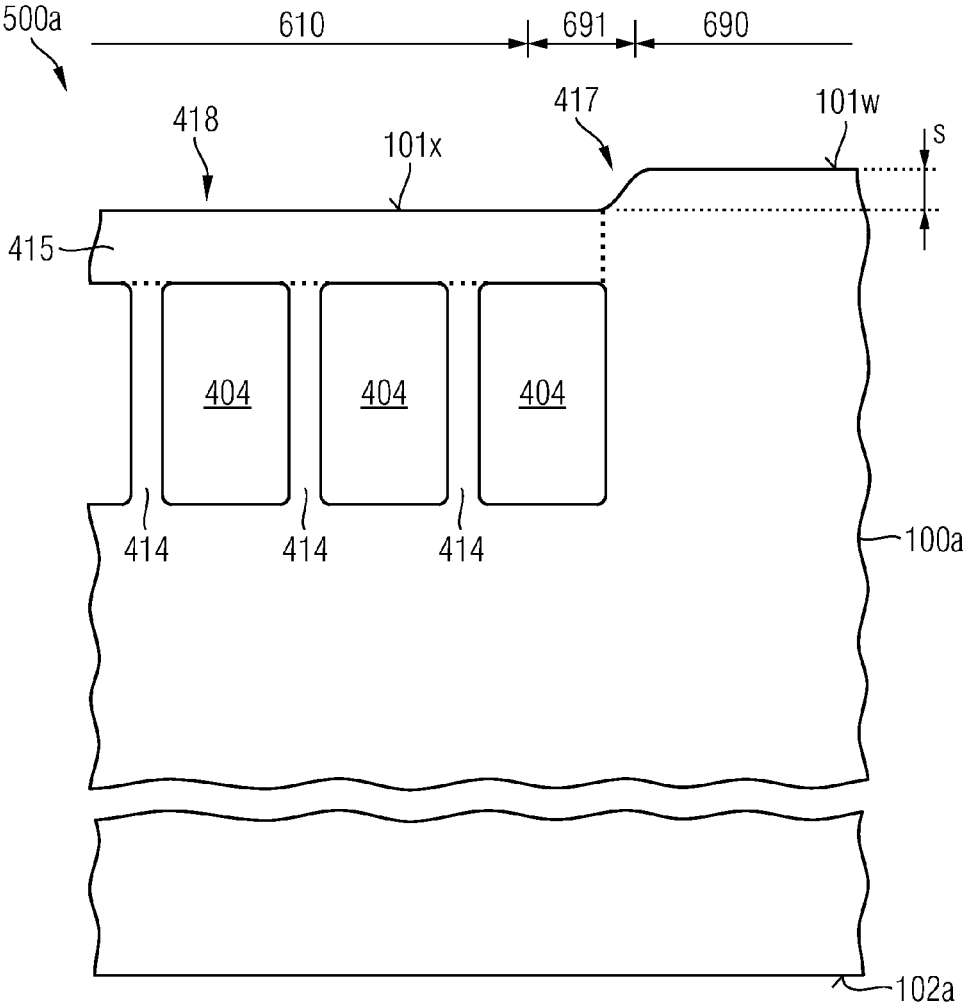


FIG 10A

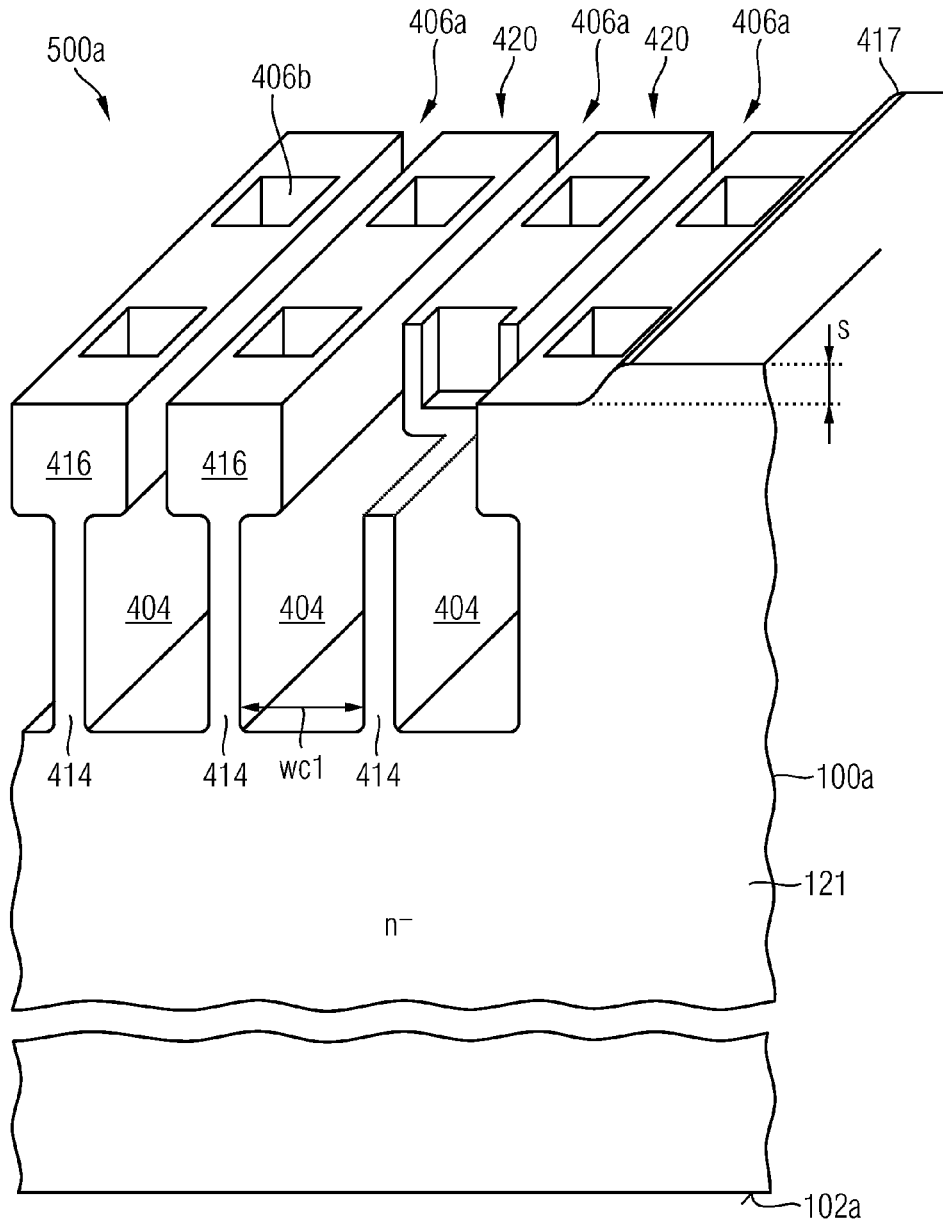


FIG 10B

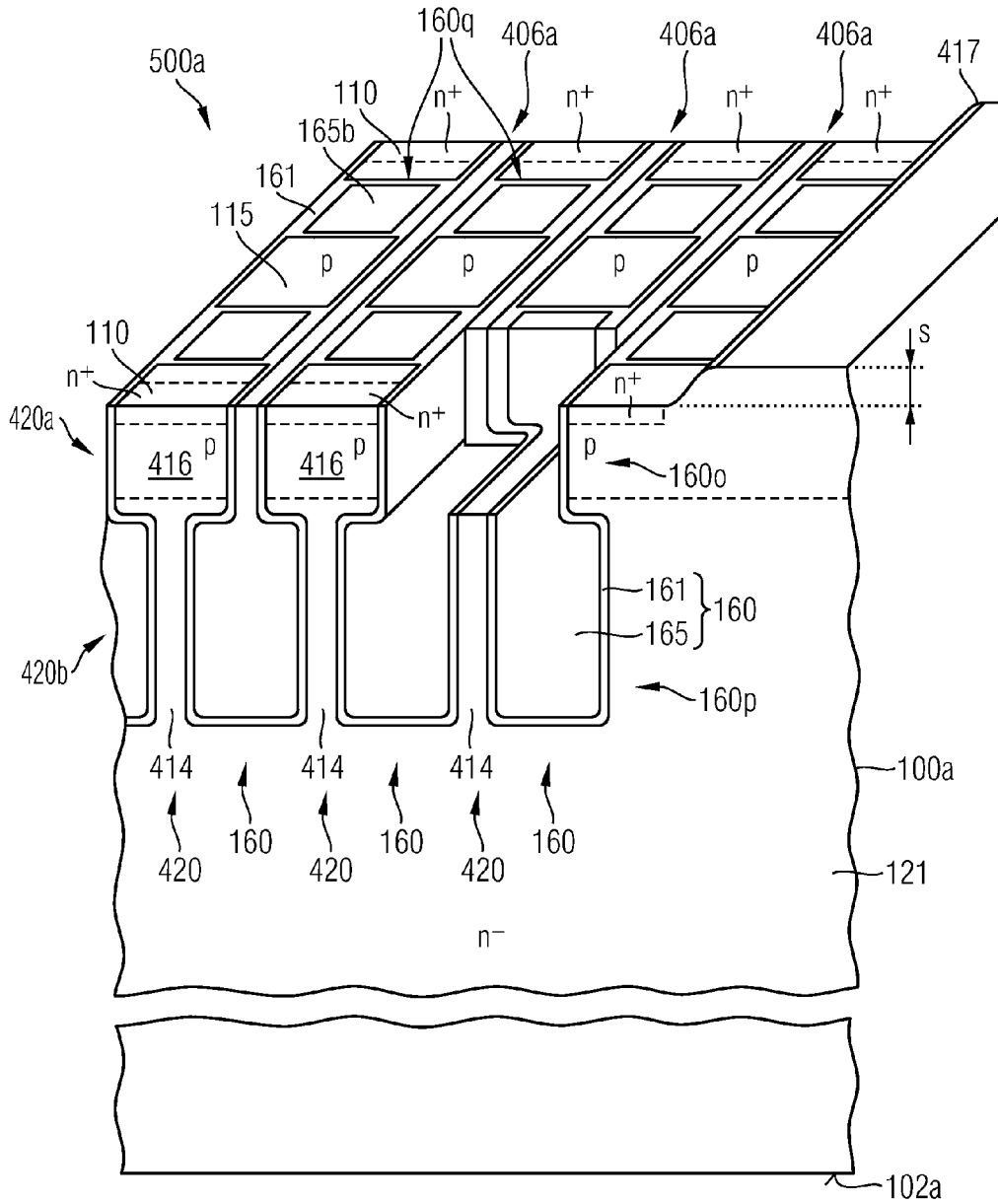


FIG 10C

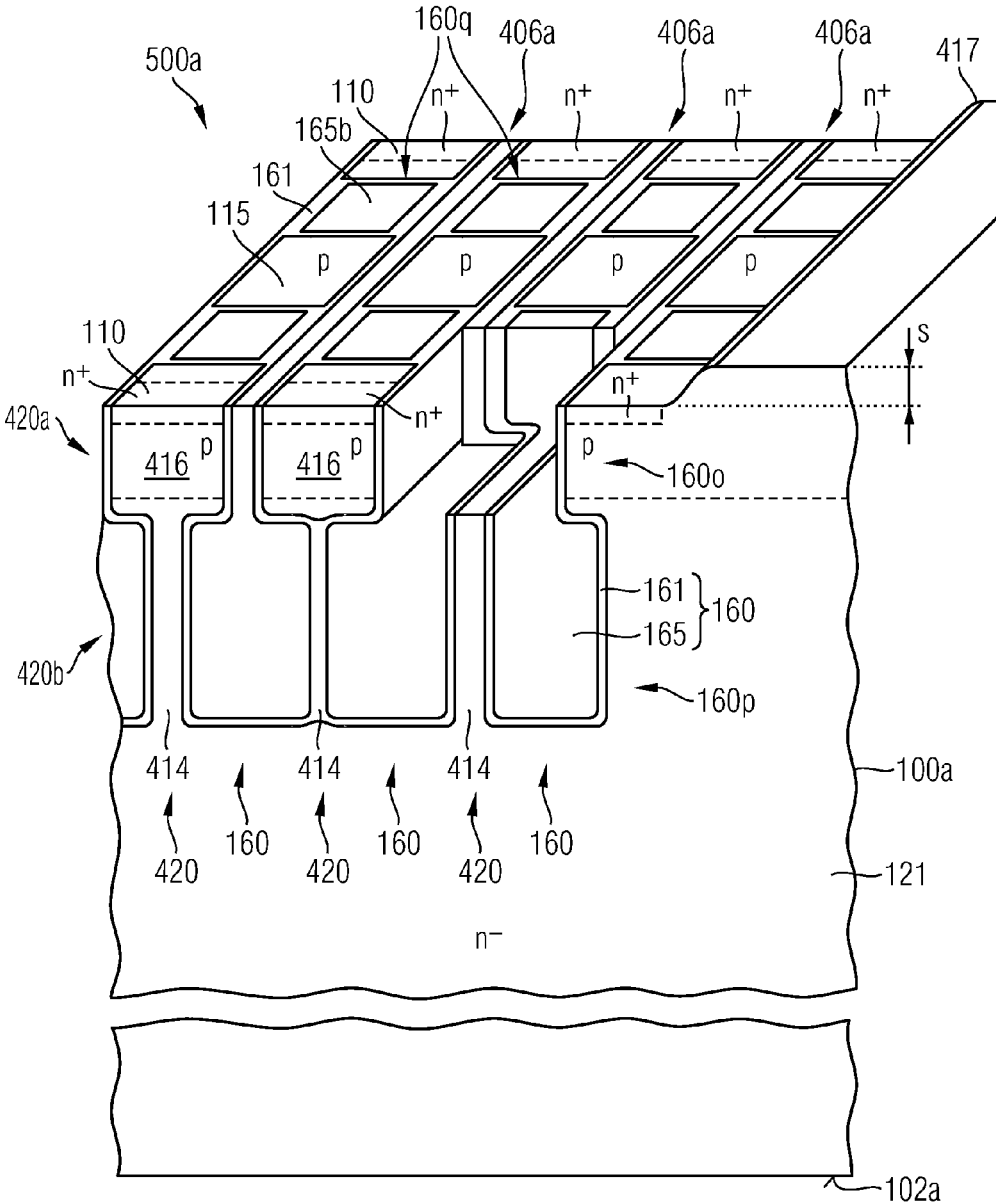


FIG 11A

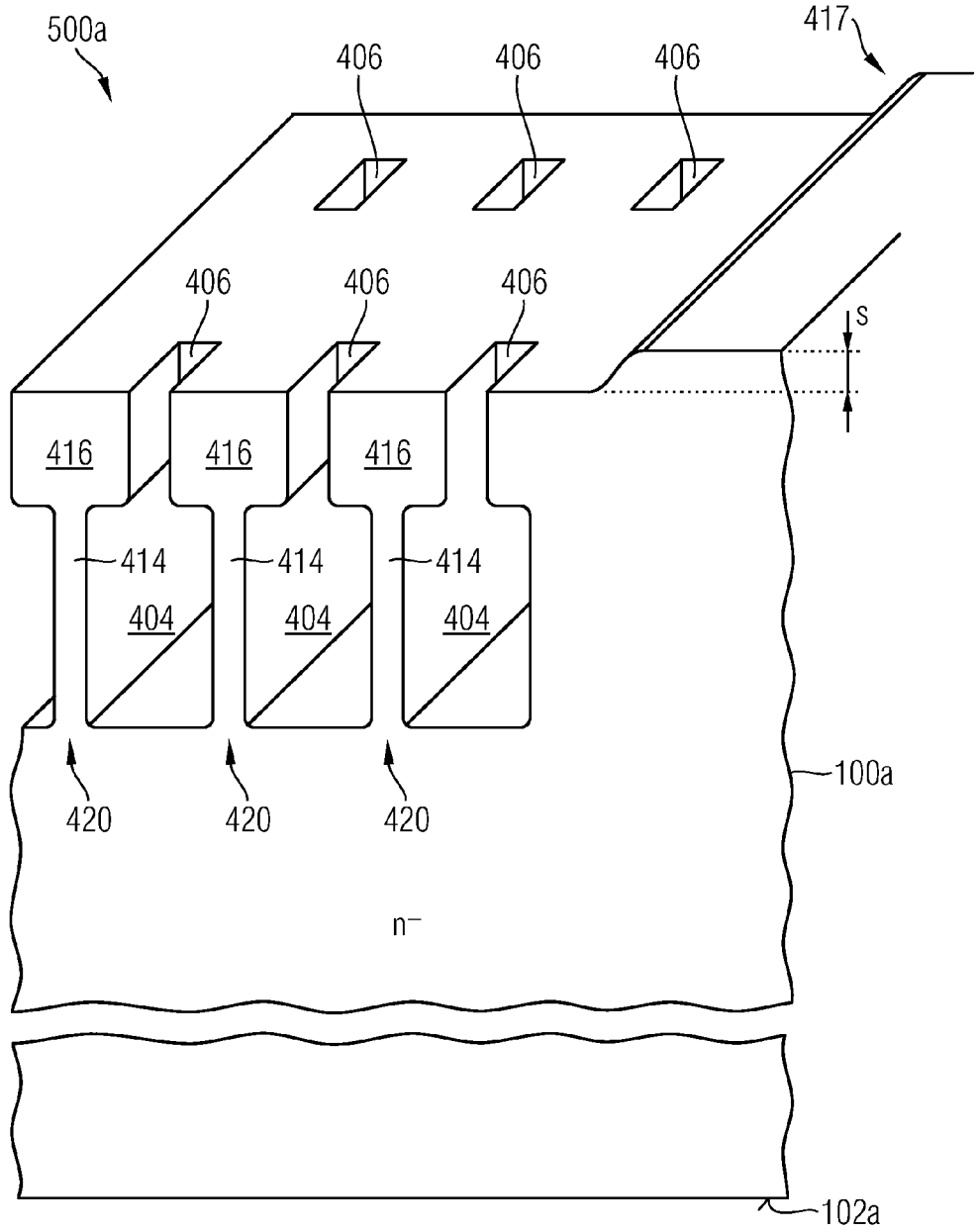


FIG 11B

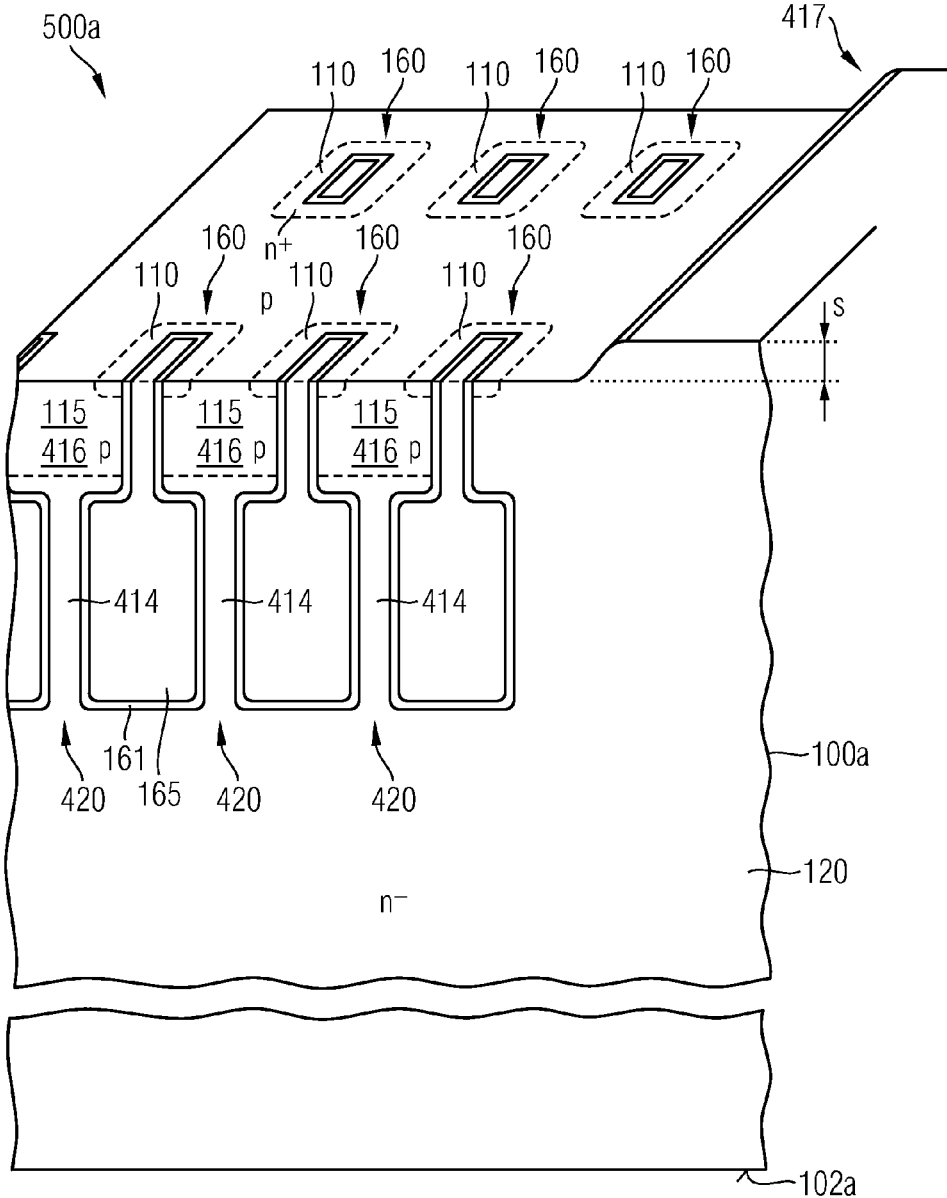


FIG 12

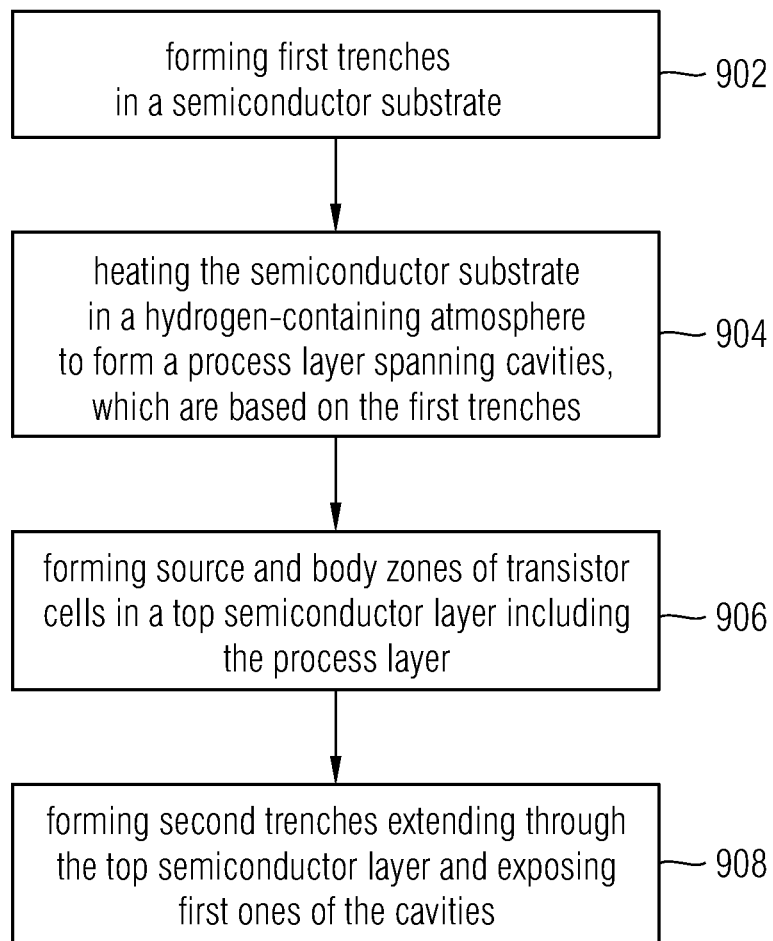
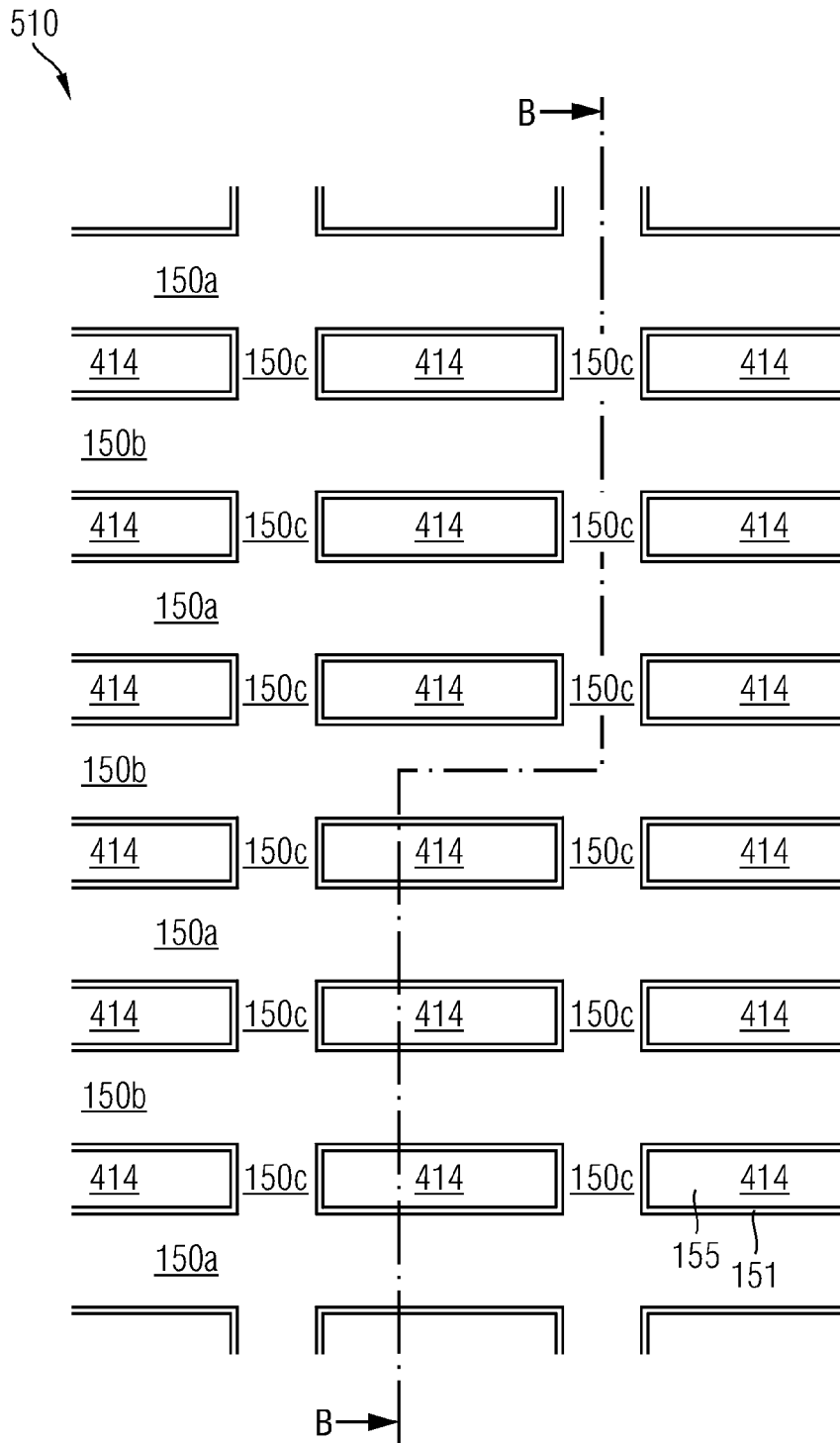


FIG 13A



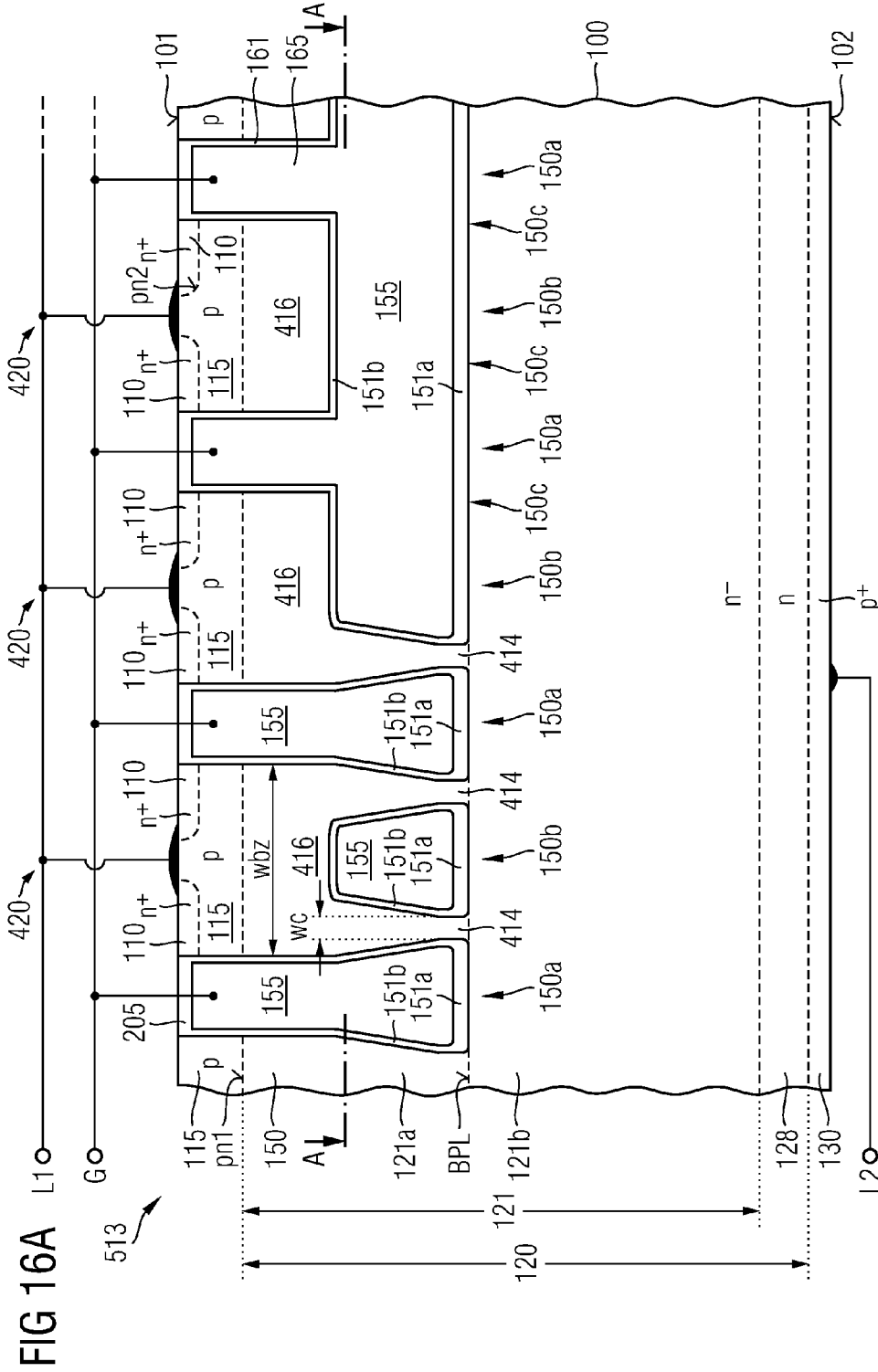
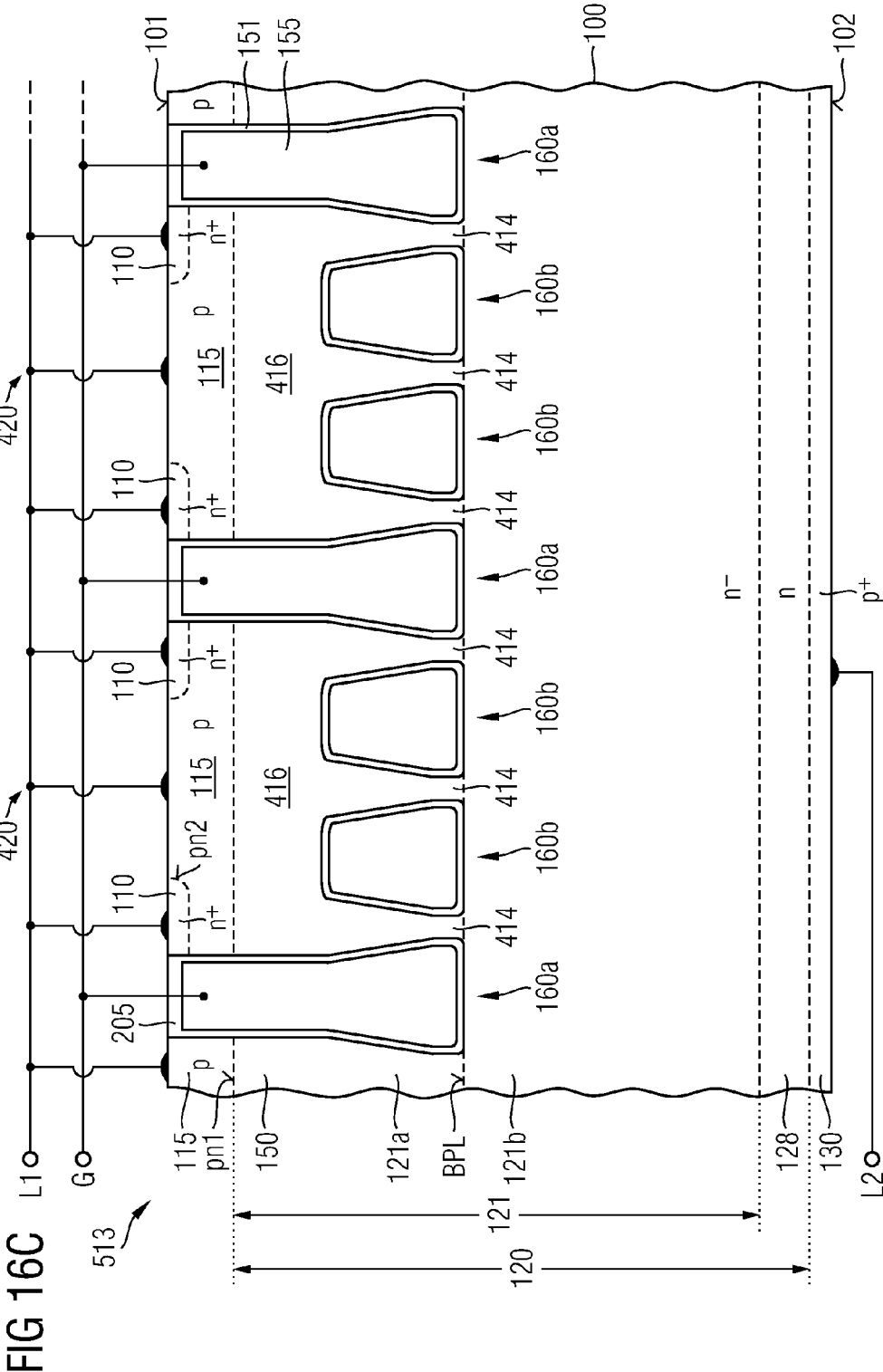


FIG 16A



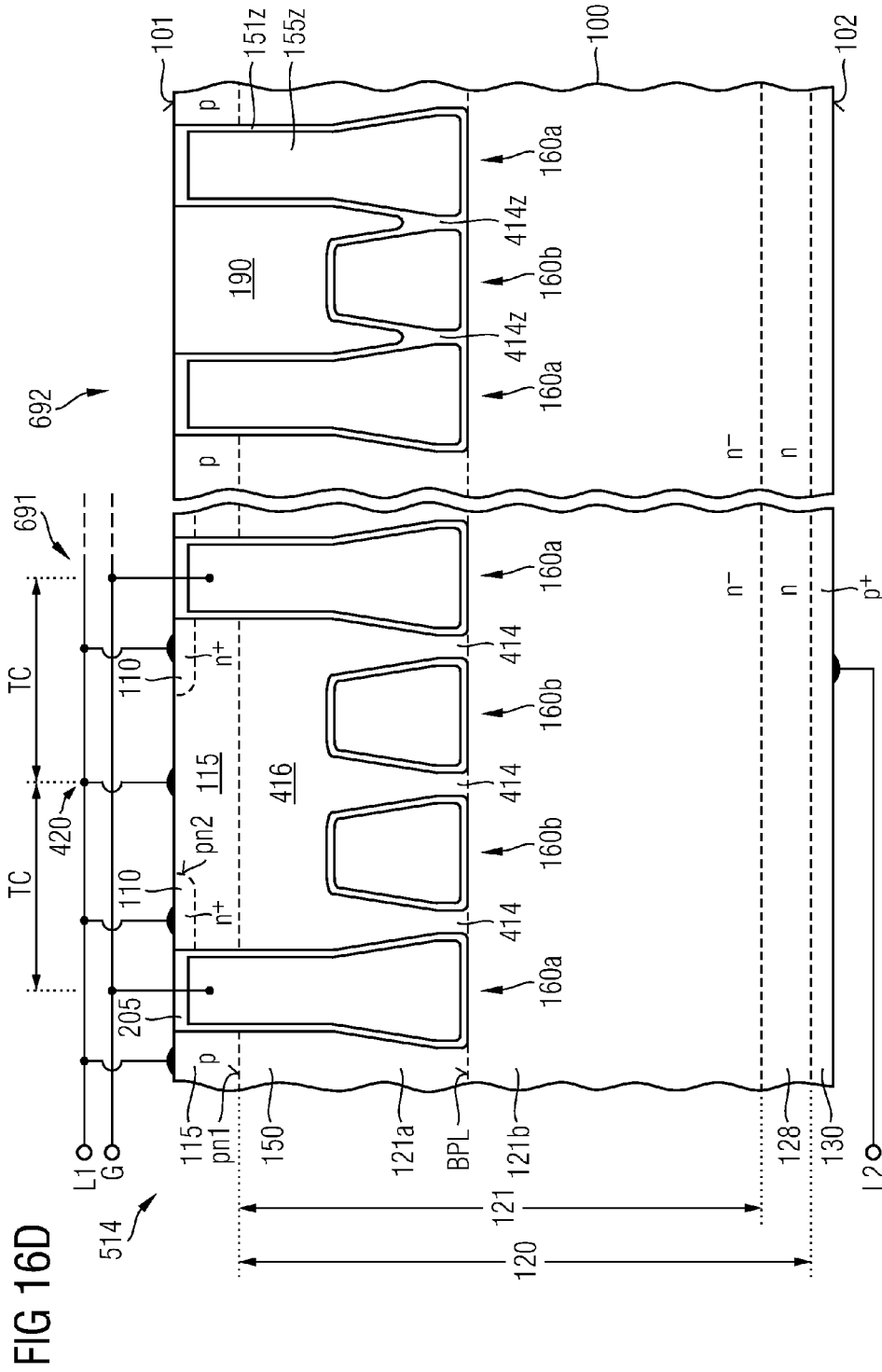


FIG 17A

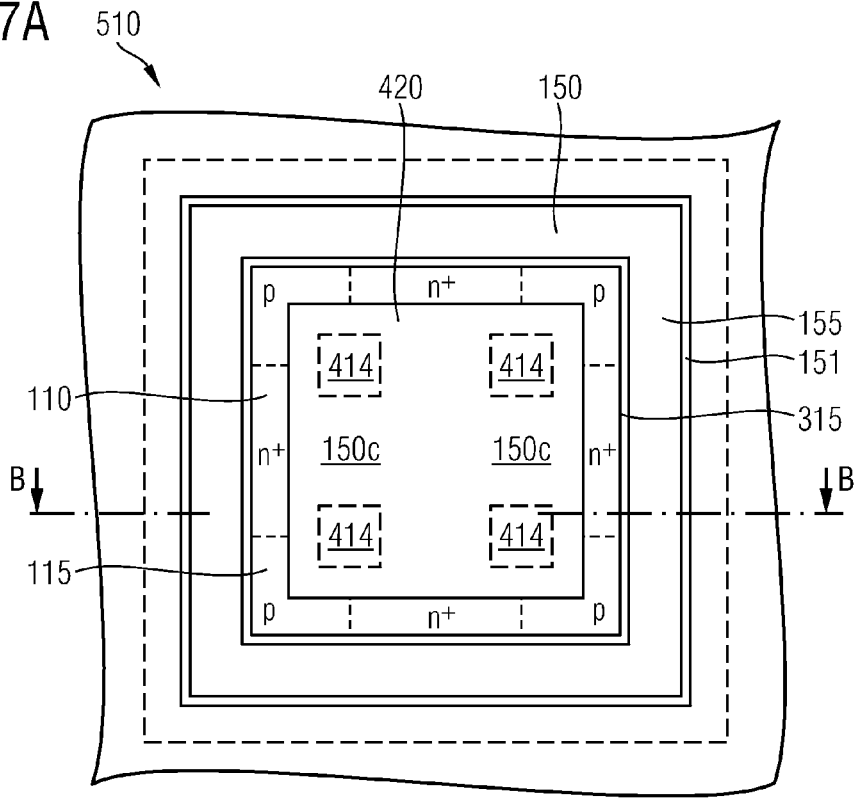


FIG 17B

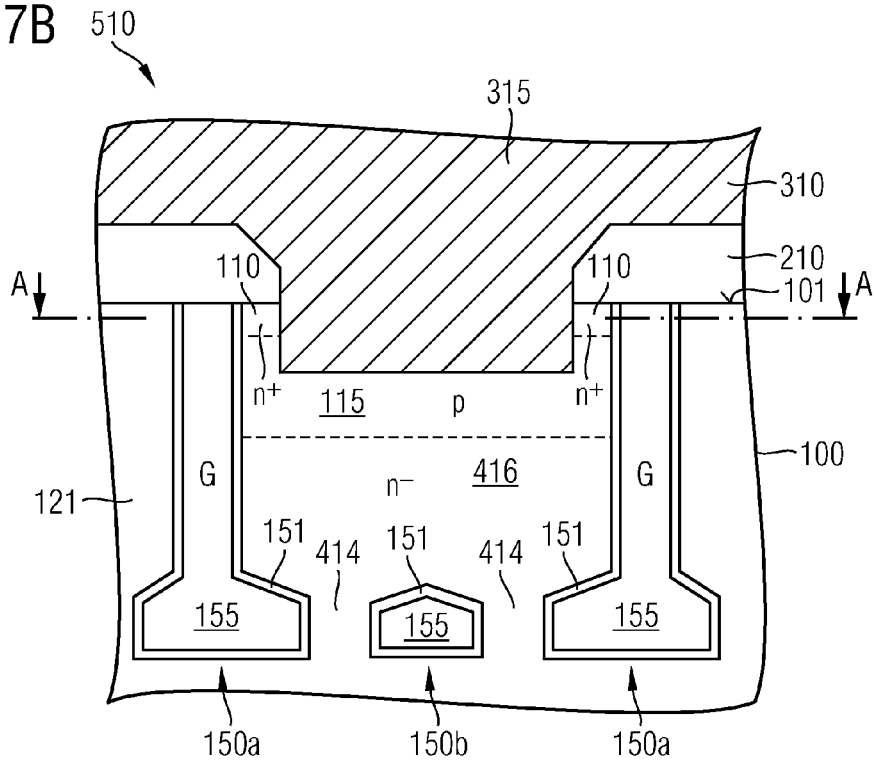


FIG 18

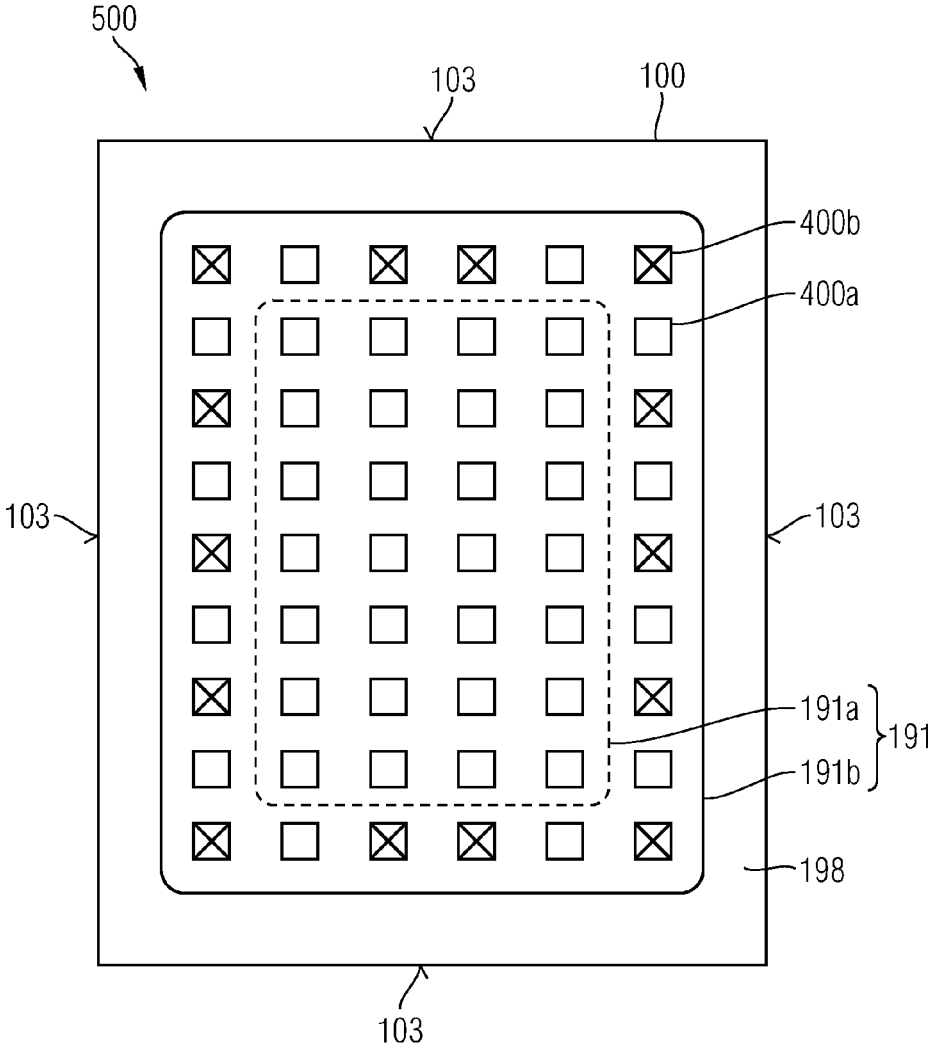


FIG 19A

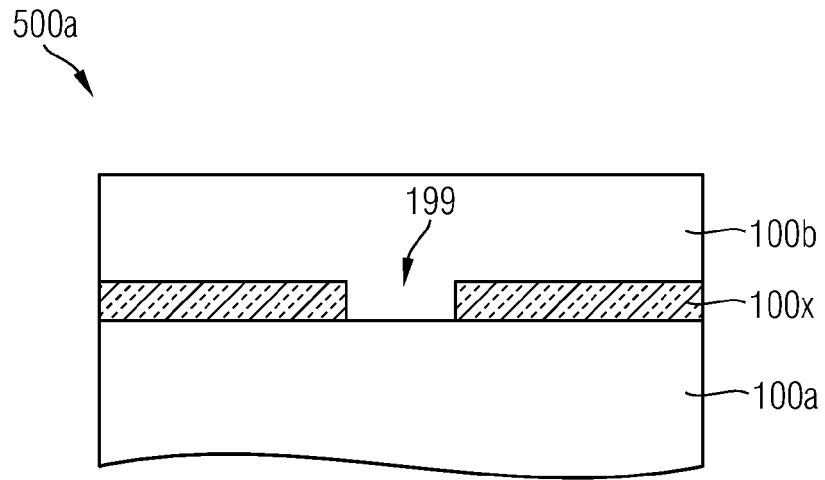
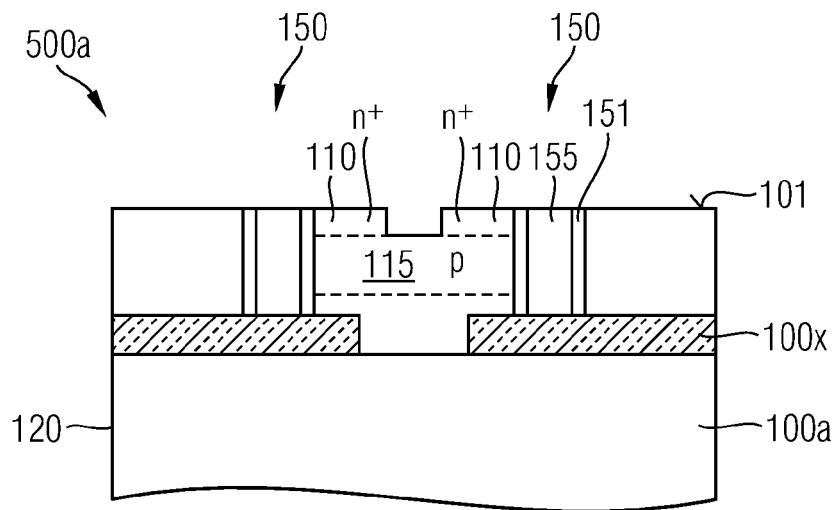


FIG 19B



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**SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICE WITH
CONTROL STRUCTURE INCLUDING
BURIED PORTIONS AND METHOD OF
MANUFACTURING**

BACKGROUND

Semiconductor devices with vertical transistor cells are based on control structures extending into a drift zone and adjoining semiconductor mesas that include the source and body zones of the transistor cells. In the on-state of the transistor cells, a high density charge carrier plasma in the drift zone ensures a low on-state resistance of the semiconductor device. Typically, thin semiconductor mesas or semiconductor mesas with constrictions reduce a leakage of charge carriers and keep the charge carrier plasma density high.

It is desirable to provide semiconductor devices with a low leakage of charge carriers from a charge carrier plasma in the on-state.

SUMMARY

According to an embodiment, a semiconductor device includes transistor cells with source zones of a first conductivity type and body zones of a second conductivity type. The source and body zones are formed in a semiconductor mesa formed from a portion of a semiconductor body. Control structures include first portions extending into the semiconductor body on at least two opposing sides of the semiconductor mesa, second portions in a distance to the first surface between the first portions, and third portions in a distance to the first surface and connecting the first and the second portions, wherein constricted sections of the semiconductor mesa are formed between neighboring third portions.

According to another embodiment, a semiconductor device includes transistor cells with source zones of a first conductivity type and body zones of a second conductivity type. The source and body zones are formed in a semiconductor mesa formed from a portion of a semiconductor body. Control structures include top portions arranged on two opposing sides of a top section of the semiconductor mesa and extending from a first surface into the semiconductor body as well as bottom portions in a distance to the first surface on opposing sides of a bottom section of the semiconductor mesa. The bottom section of the semiconductor mesa is connected to the top section. Horizontal longitudinal extension variations of an effective width of the bottom section are independent from variations of an effective width of the top section of the semiconductor mesa.

According to a further embodiment, a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device includes forming first trenches extending from a process surface into a semiconductor substrate formed from a semiconductor material. The semiconductor substrate is heated in a hydrogen-containing ambient, wherein a portion of the semiconductor material at the process surface fluidifies and forms a contiguous process layer spanning cavities based on the first trenches. Source and body zones of transistor cells are formed in a top semiconductor layer including at least the process layer. Second trenches are formed that extend through the top semiconductor layer and that expose at least first ones of the cavities.

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

5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings are included to provide a further understanding of the invention and are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification. The drawings illustrate the embodiments of the present invention and together with the description serve to explain principles of the invention. Other embodiments of the invention and intended advantages will be readily appreciated as they become better understood by reference to the following detailed description.

FIG. 1A is a schematic cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an embodiment including epitaxial growth above cavities after forming first trenches in a base portion.

FIG. 1B is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 1A after forming cavities by heating the semiconductor substrate in a hydrogen-containing ambient.

FIG. 1C is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 1B after growing an epitaxial layer.

FIG. 1D is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 1C after forming second trenches exposing first cavities.

FIG. 1E is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 1D after forming transistor cells above the cavities.

FIG. 2A is a schematic cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an embodiment concerning a mask liner in first trenches, after providing the mask liner.

FIG. 2B is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 2A after forming cavities by a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient.

FIG. 3A is a schematic cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an embodiment providing wide cavities, after forming first trenches in a base layer.

FIG. 3B is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 3A after forming cavities by a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient.

FIG. 3C is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 3B after forming second trenches opening first cavities.

FIG. 4A is a schematic perspective view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an embodiment related to communicating cavities after forming first trenches.

FIG. 4B is a schematic perspective view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 4A after a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient.

FIG. 4C is a schematic perspective view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 4B after forming transistor cells.

FIG. 5A is a schematic cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a method of

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manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an embodiment providing transistor cells in a layer formed by a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient after forming first trenches.

FIG. 5B is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 5A after forming cavities by a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient.

FIG. 5C is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 5B after forming transistor cells.

FIG. 6A is a schematic cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an embodiment concerning the formation of cavities after formation of a thermal semiconductor oxide.

FIG. 6B is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 6A after forming the cavities by a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient.

FIG. 6C is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 6B after forming transistor cells.

FIG. 7A is a schematic cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate in accordance with an embodiment related to vertically patterned first trenches after forming the first trenches.

FIG. 7B is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 7A after forming cavities by a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient.

FIG. 8A is a schematic perspective view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate in accordance with an embodiment related to semiconductor mesas with varying widths along longitudinal axes after forming second trenches.

FIG. 8B is a schematic perspective view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 8A after forming control structures.

FIG. 9A is a schematic perspective view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a further method of patterning semiconductor mesas along longitudinal axes after forming second trenches that locally constrict the semiconductor mesas.

FIG. 9B is a schematic perspective view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 9A after forming control structures.

FIG. 10A is a schematic perspective view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a further method of patterning semiconductor mesas along longitudinal axes after forming second trenches including stripe and hole trenches.

FIG. 10B is a schematic perspective view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 10A after forming control structures.

FIG. 10C is a schematic perspective view of a portion of a semiconductor device including a completely insulated semiconductor section in a cell area.

FIG. 11A is a schematic perspective view of a semiconductor substrate portion for illustrating a method of manufacturing semiconductor devices according to an embodiment related to isolated second trenches along longitudinal axes of the semiconductor mesas after forming the second trenches.

FIG. 11B is a schematic perspective view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 11A after forming control structures.

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FIG. 12 is a simplified flowchart of a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to a further embodiment.

FIG. 13A is a schematic horizontal cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment providing buried control structure portions for IGFETs (insulated gate field effect transistors) and semiconductor diodes.

FIG. 13B is a schematic vertical cross-sectional view of the semiconductor device portion of FIG. 13A along line B-B.

FIG. 14 is a schematic vertical cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment providing buried control structure portions for RC-IGBTs (reverse conducting insulated gate bipolar transistors) and desaturable semiconductor diodes.

FIG. 15 is a schematic vertical cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment providing buried control structure portions for IGBTs.

FIG. 16A is a schematic vertical cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment referring to IGBTs with a modification of the control dielectric.

FIG. 16B is a schematic vertical cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment referring to IGBTs whose control structures include gate and field electrodes.

FIG. 16C is a schematic vertical cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment referring to IGBTs with a modification of the number of separation strips per semiconductor mesa.

FIG. 16D is a schematic vertical cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment related to semiconductor switching devices with auxiliary circuits.

FIG. 17A is a schematic horizontal cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment providing buried control structure portions for semiconductor devices with short semiconductor mesas.

FIG. 17B is a schematic vertical cross-sectional view of the semiconductor device portion of FIG. 17A along line B-B.

FIG. 18 is a schematic horizontal cross-sectional view of a semiconductor device according to an embodiment concerning a modification of the constricted mesa sections in the vicinity of an edge termination area.

FIG. 19A is a schematic cross-sectional view of a portion of a semiconductor substrate for illustrating a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to an embodiment concerning the formation of a buried dielectric structure.

FIG. 19B is a schematic cross-sectional view of the semiconductor substrate portion of FIG. 19A after forming control structures.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following detailed description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part hereof and in which are shown by way of illustrations specific embodiments in which the invention may be practiced. It is to be understood that other embodiments may be utilized and structural or logical changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention. For example, features illustrated or described for one embodiment can be used on or in conjunction with other embodiments to yield yet a further embodiment. It is intended that the present

invention includes such modifications and variations. The examples are described using specific language, which should not be construed as limiting the scope of the appending claims. The drawings are not scaled and are for illustrative purposes only. For clarity, the same elements have been designated by corresponding references in the different drawings if not stated otherwise.

The terms “having,” “containing,” “including,” “comprising” and the like are open, and the terms indicate the presence of stated structures, 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.

The term “electrically connected” describes a permanent low-ohmic connection between electrically connected elements, for example a direct contact between the concerned elements or a low-ohmic connection via a metal and/or highly doped semiconductor. The term “electrically coupled” includes that one or more intervening element(s) adapted for signal transmission may be provided between the electrically coupled elements, for example elements that are controllable to temporarily provide a low-ohmic connection in a first state and a high-ohmic electric decoupling in a second state.

The Figures illustrate relative doping concentrations by indicating “-” or “+” next to the doping type “n” or “p”. For example, “n-” means a doping concentration which is lower than the doping concentration of an “n”-doping region while an “n+”-doping region has a higher doping concentration than an “n”-doping region. Doping regions of the same relative doping concentration do not necessarily have the same absolute doping concentration. For example, two different “n”-doping regions may have the same or different absolute doping concentrations.

FIGS. 1A to 1E refer to a method of forming control structures with buried portions that locally narrow semiconductor mesas between the control structures.

A semiconductor substrate **500a** may include a base portion **100a**. The base portion **100a** may include a base substrate of single-crystalline semiconductor material, e.g., silicon (Si), germanium (Ge), a silicon germanium crystal (SiGe), silicon carbide (SiC), gallium nitride (GaN) or another $A_{III}B_V$ semiconductor. The base portion **100a** may further include a semiconductor layer, e.g., a layer grown by epitaxy on the base substrate, wherein the base substrate and the semiconductor layer may differ with regard to the conductivity type and/or the impurity concentration. A crystal lattice of the semiconductor layer may grow in registry with the crystal lattice of the base substrate.

The semiconductor substrate **500a** may be, for example, a semiconductor wafer with a process surface **101w** on a front side and a rear side surface **102a** on a rear side, wherein the rear side surface **102a** and the process surface **101w** are parallel. Directions parallel to the process surface **101w** are horizontal directions and a direction perpendicular to the process surface **101w** defines a vertical direction.

One or more first trenches **402** are formed in the semiconductor substrate **500a**, wherein the first trenches **402** extend from the process surface **101w** of the base portion **100a** into the semiconductor substrate **500a**. For example, a first hard mask layer may be formed on the process surface **101w** and patterned by photolithography to form a first hard mask. Using the first hard mask as an etch mask, the first trenches **402** may be etched by reactive ion etching, e.g., reactive ion beam etching. According to other embodiments,

the first trenches **402** may be formed by locally masking an epitaxial growth of at least a portion of the semiconductor layer.

FIG. 1A shows the first trenches **402** extending from the process surface **101w** into the base portion **100a**. Portions of the base portion **100a** between the first trenches **402** form first mesas **412**.

The first trenches **402** may be arranged in several isolated cell fields and may form regular stripe patterns in the cell fields. According to other embodiments, a mean width $wm1$ of the first mesas **412** and/or a mean width $w1$ of the first trenches **402** may increase or decrease with decreasing distance to an outer edge of the respective cell field, respectively. The widths $w1$, $wm1$ of the first trenches **402** and the first mesas **412** may be uniform along their longitudinal axes orthogonal to the cross-sectional plane. The first trenches **402** may be separated from each other. According to other embodiments some or all of the first trenches **402** are connected to each other. For example, neighboring first trenches **402** may form a ladder-like structure with the cross-sectional view of FIG. 1A showing the rails and with the rungs arranged in a plane parallel to the cross-sectional plane. A vertical extension $d1$ of the first trenches **402** may be between 100 nm and 7 μm , for example in a range from 400 nm to 5 μm . The width $w1$ of the first trenches **402** may range from 20 nm to 2 μm , for example from 100 nm to 300 nm. A width $wm1$ of the first mesas **412** may be between 20 nm and 1 μm , for example in a range from 50 nm to 400 nm. A cross-sectional area of the first trenches **402** may be invariant along a first horizontal direction perpendicular to the cross-sectional plane. According to other embodiments, the cross-sectional area of the first trenches **402** may vary along the first horizontal direction.

The semiconductor substrate **500a** may be heated in a hydrogen-containing ambient to temperatures above 900° C. or above 1000° C. or between 1050 and 1150° C. for at least 5 minutes or at least 10 minutes or longer. Due to the high surface mobility of, e.g., silicon atoms in a hydrogen-containing atmosphere, the material of the base portion **100a** becomes viscous and a slow moving flow of viscous silicon occludes the first trenches **402**. The closed first trenches **402** form cavities **404**. The heat supply is stopped when a contiguous process layer **415** formed from the resolidifying semiconductor material covers the cavities **404**. When the heat supply stops, the semiconductor material of the base portion **100a** solidifies and recrystallizes.

FIG. 1B shows the process layer **415** formed from portions of the semiconductor material of the base portion **100a**. A mean thickness $th1$ of the process layer **415** may be between 10 nm and 3 μm , for example between 50 nm and 2 μm . The process layer **415** closes the cavities **404**. An exposed surface of the process layer **415** forms a modified process surface **101x**. A minimum width ws of separating strips **414** between the cavities **404** may be equal to or smaller than the mean width $wm1$ of the first mesas **412** of FIG. 1A. The width ws of the separating strips **414** may be between 10 nm and 400 nm, for example between 100 nm and 300 nm.

According to an embodiment the process layer **415** forms a top semiconductor layer in which source zones **110** and at least portions of body zones **115** of transistor cells TC are formed. According to the illustrated embodiment an epitaxial layer **100b** is formed on the modified process surface **101x**, wherein the epitaxial layer **100b** grows in registry with the crystal lattice of the process layer **415**.

FIG. 1C shows the semiconductor substrate **500a** including the base portion **100a** and the epitaxial layer **100b**

formed on the process layer **415**. A vertical extension $d2$ of the epitaxial layer **100b** may be between 100 nm and 5 μm , for example between 200 nm and 4 μm . The epitaxial layer **100b** and the process layer **415** form the top semiconductor layer. An exposed surface of the epitaxial layer **100b** opposite to the process layer **415** forms a main surface **101a** on a front side of the semiconductor substrate **500a**. The epitaxial layer **100b** and the process layer **415** form the top semiconductor layer. During epitaxy the shape of the cavities **404** may get more rounded.

Second trenches **406** that extend through the epitaxial layer **100b** and the process layer **415** are formed in the main surface **100a**. The second trenches **406** extend through the top semiconductor layer and open at least some of the first cavities **404** or all cavities **404**. For example, a second hard mask layer may be deposited and patterned by photolithography to form a second hard mask and the second trenches **406** are formed by RIE in portions of the top semiconductor layer exposed by the second hard mask.

FIG. 1D shows the second trenches **406** extending from the main surface **100a** through the epitaxial layer **100b** and the process layer **415** into the base portion **100a**. The second trenches **406** may expose all cavities **404** or some of the cavities **404**, for example each n -th cavity **404**, with $n \geq 2$. According to an embodiment the second trenches **406** expose each second or each third cavity **404**. The second trenches **406** may extend along the complete longitudinal extension of the respective cavity **404**. According to other embodiments, the width of the second trenches **406** may vary along the longitudinal axes of the cavities **404** or a plurality of isolated second trenches **406** may be formed along the longitudinal axis of a concerned cavity **404**. A width $w2$ of the second trenches **406** may be between 20 nm and 1 μm , for example between 300 nm and 800 nm. Second mesas **416** formed between neighboring second trenches **406** may have a width $wm2$ ranging from 50 nm to 15 μm , for example from 100 nm to 800 nm. One of the second mesas **416** forms a top section **420a** and the separating strips **414** connected to the respective second mesa **416** form a bottom section **420b** of a semiconductor mesa **420**.

According to an embodiment, after forming the second trenches **406**, the semiconductor substrate **500a** may be subjected to a further heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient, wherein the vertical extension of all or some of the cavities **404** may be modified. For example, a comparatively short heat treatment in a hydrogen-containing atmosphere may round corners and edges along transitions between the cavities **404** and the second trenches **406**. According to another embodiment, a further process layer may be grown that closes the second trenches **406** and a further epitaxial layer may be grown on the further process layer.

Source zones **110** and at least portions of body zones **115** are formed in the top semiconductor layer including at least the epitaxial layer **100b** and the process layer **415**, or, in absence of any epitaxial layer, consisting of the process layer **415**. Control structures including gate structures **150** with gate electrodes **155** are formed in the second trenches **406** and the cavities **404**. The control structures may further include field electrode structures with field electrodes that may be electrically connected to the source zones **110**.

According to an embodiment, gate structures **150** may be formed in the second trenches **406** as well as in the cavities **404**. According to other embodiments, the gate structures **150** are formed at least in portions of the second trenches **406** and field electrode structures with field electrodes dielectrically insulated from the gate electrodes **155** are

formed at least in portions of the cavities **404**. According to further embodiments, the gate structures **150** may be formed at least in portions of the cavities **404** and the field electrode structures with field electrodes dielectrically insulated from the gate electrodes **155** are formed at least in portions of the second trenches **406**.

FIG. 1E refers to an embodiment with the gate structures **150** formed in both the second trenches **406** and the cavities **404** of FIG. 1D. The gate structures **150** include a gate dielectric **151**, which may be formed by thermal oxidation of the semiconductor material of the base portion **100a** and the epitaxial layer **100b** or by highly conformal layer deposition of a dielectric material. The gate structures **150** further include gate electrodes **155** formed by depositing conductive material, for example heavily doped polycrystalline silicon, and removing portions of the deposited conductive material from above the main surface **101a**. Since second cavities **404**, which are not opened by the second trenches **406**, communicate with the first cavities **404** opened by the second trenches **406**, materials and process fluids deployed to the semiconductor substrate **500a** can flow into all second cavities.

An interlayer dielectric **210** may be deposited and patterned by photolithography such that openings in the interlayer dielectric **210** expose portions of the source and body zones **110**, **115**. Along the second surface **102a** a heavily doped pedestal layer **130** may be formed, for example from the base substrate or, in absence of a heavily doped base substrate, by an implant through the rear side surface **102a**. Portions of the semiconductor substrate **500a** between the body zones **115** and the pedestal layer **130** may form a weakly doped drift zone **121** and a field stop layer **128** between the drift zone **121** and the pedestal layer **130**. A first load electrode **310** may be formed in direct contact with the source and body zones **110**, **115** on the front side and a second load electrode **320** directly adjoining the pedestal layer **130** may be formed on the rear side.

FIG. 1E shows interconnected gate structures **150** in at least some of the cavities **404** and the second trenches **406** of FIG. 1D. The material of the gate electrodes **155** may leave voids **157** in the former cavities **404** or may fill them completely. The source zones **110** may be formed in each semiconductor mesa **420**, or in each m -th semiconductor mesa **420**, with $m \geq 2$. Within each semiconductor mesa **420**, one single source zone **110** may directly adjoin one of the neighboring gate structures **150** or both, or two separated source zones **110** may adjoin both neighboring gate structures **150**. A transistor cell TC includes a half of a semiconductor mesa **420** including a source zone **110** and the adjoining portions of the gate structures **150**. The body zones **115** are formed in the top sections **420a** of the semiconductor mesas **420**. According to an embodiment, the body zones **115** do not extend into the separating strips **414**.

The interconnected gate structures **150** may be formed in all cavities **404** and second trenches **406** of FIG. 1D. According to another embodiment, the gate structures **150** are formed in only some of the cavities **404** and second trenches **406** of FIG. 1D and field electrode structures with field electrodes that may be electrically connected to the source zones **110** may be formed in further ones of the cavities **404** and second trenches **406**.

A plurality of identical semiconductor dies for semiconductor devices may be obtained from the semiconductor substrate **500a** by a separation process that includes, for example, cutting, sawing or laser dicing.

FIGS. 2A and 2B refer to an embodiment with a patterned mask liner **203** supporting the formation of the cavities **404**.

After formation of the first trenches **402** as illustrated in FIG. 1A, a mask layer may be formed on the process surface **101w** as well as along inner sidewall and bottom portions of the first trenches **402**. Forming the mask layer may include a heating treatment of the semiconductor substrate **500a** in an ambient containing oxygen and/or nitrogen, and/or deposition of at least one mask material. According to an embodiment, forming the mask layer includes a highly conformal deposition using, e.g., TEOS (tetraethyl orthosilicate) as precursor material.

According to a further embodiment, the mask layer may include at least one low-conformal layer, e.g., an HDP (high density plasma) oxide that closes the first trenches **402** with mask plugs, e.g., oxide plugs leaving voids in the first trenches **402**.

The mask layer may be recessed such that portions of the mask layer outside the first trenches **402** and on portions of the sidewalls of the first trenches **402** adjoining the process surface **101w** are removed.

A mask layer forming mask plugs may be isotropically recessed. For recessing a conformal mask layer that does not form plugs in the first trenches **402**, a sacrificial material, e.g., a resist may be deposited and recessed to form resist plugs in portions of the first trenches **402** averted from the process surface **101w**. The resist plugs may be used as an etch mask during the recess of the mask layer. After the recess of the mask layer, the resist plugs may be removed.

FIG. 2A shows a mask liner **203** formed from remnant portions of the mask layer. Portions of the sidewalls of the first trenches **402** oriented to the process surface **101w** are exposed. A vertical extension *r* of the exposed sidewall portions may be selected such that the volume of the semiconductor material of the exposed portions of the first mesas **412** is sufficient to close the first trenches **402** and to form a contiguous process layer of a desired thickness.

During the following heating treatment in hydrogen-containing atmosphere, the mask liner **203** keeps in shape portions of the first mesas **412** covered by the mask liner **203** such that the width of separating strips **414** between the cavities **404** is exclusively defined by the width of the first mesas **412** and is not subjected to process variations of the heat treatment.

The process may proceed as discussed with reference to FIGS. 1C to 1E, wherein the mask liner **203** may be removed prior to the formation of a control dielectric or may form a portion of the control dielectric, for example, a portion of a field dielectric or the gate dielectric.

FIGS. 3A to 3C refer to an embodiment providing wide cavities. The first trenches **402** are formed such that both wide **412a** and narrow **412b** first mesas are formed between pairs of neighboring first trenches **402**.

According to the embodiment of FIG. 3A wide and narrow first mesas **412a**, **412b** are alternately arranged. According to other embodiments, more than one narrow mesa **412b** may be formed between two neighboring wide first mesas **412a** and vice versa. The wide first mesas **412a**, the narrow first mesas **412b** or both may be long mesas extending through a cell field or short mesas arranged within each cell field along a horizontal direction orthogonal to the cross-sectional plane. A width *w1* of the wide first mesas **412a** and a width *w2* of the narrow first mesas **412b** are selected such that after a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient the narrow first mesas **412b** almost or completely disappear, whereas the wide first mesas **412a** transform to the separating strips **414** separating neighboring

cavities **404** and supporting the process layer **415**, which is formed from portions of the wide and narrow first mesas **412a**, **412b**.

FIG. 3B shows cavities **404**, wherein one cavity **404** emerges from two first trenches **402** separated by narrow first mesas **412b**, respectively. The separating strips **414** are formed from remnant portions of the wide first mesas **412a**.

Second trenches **406** may be etched from the main surface **101a** through the process layer **415a** capping the cavities **404**, and, if applicable, an epitaxial layer **100b** formed on the exposed modified process surface **101x** of the process layer **415**.

FIG. 3C shows semiconductor mesas **420** including two or more of the separating strips **414**, which separate neighboring cavities **404**, as well as second mesas **416** separating second trenches **406** in a horizontal direction parallel to the cross-sectional plane.

FIGS. 4A to 4C show details of a process according to an embodiment providing communicating cavities **404**. First trenches are formed in a semiconductor substrate **500a** as described above with reference to FIG. 1A.

According to FIG. 4A the first trenches include longitudinal trenches **402a** extending in a first horizontal direction and lateral trenches **402b** extending in a second horizontal direction and connecting neighboring longitudinal trenches **402a**. The longitudinal and lateral trenches **402a**, **402b** may form a grid with isolated first mesas **412** arranged in the meshes. The lateral trenches **402b** may be formed along lines or in a staggered manner. The semiconductor substrate **500a** is heated as described with reference to FIG. 1B.

FIG. 4B shows communicating cavities **404** formed from the longitudinal and lateral trenches **402a**, **402b** of FIG. 4A by the heating treatment in hydrogen-containing ambient and, if applicable, by formation of an epitaxial layer **100b** above the communicating cavities **404**. Separation strips **414** separate neighboring cavities **404** in sections of their longitudinal axes.

From the main surface **101a** formed by the exposed surface of the epitaxial layer **100b** second trenches are introduced into the semiconductor substrate **500a**, wherein the second trenches may expose at least portions of first ones of the cavities **404** based on the longitudinal trenches **402a** of FIG. 4A. A thermal oxidation or a highly conformal deposition process may form a control dielectric **161**. Since the cavities **404** communicate and are interconnected to each other, process fluids for the formation of the control dielectric **151** can be also supplied to second ones of the cavities **404** without direct access to the main surface **101a**. One or more conductive materials, including, for example, heavily doped polycrystalline silicon may be deposited. The conductive material distributes in the communicating cavities **404** and the second trenches and form control electrodes **165**. Before, during or after formation of the second trenches, source and body zones **110**, **115** may be formed in semiconductor mesas **420**, wherein a semiconductor mesa **420** includes a second mesa **416** between control structures **160** extending from the first surface **101a** into the semiconductor substrate **500a** as well as at least two separation strips **414** connected with the second mesa **416**.

FIG. 4C shows control structures **160** including the control dielectric **161** and the control electrode **165**. A control structure **160** includes a first portion **160a** extending on opposing sides of the semiconductor mesas **420** from the main surface **101a** into the semiconductor substrate **500a**. Second portions **160b** of the control structures **160** are formed in a distance to the main surface **101a** between the first portions **160a**. In first sections of their longitudinal

axes, separation strips **414** separate the first and second portions **160a**, **160b** along a horizontal direction orthogonal to the longitudinal axes of the first and second portions **160a**, **160b**. Third portions **160c** formed in a distance to the main surface **101a** connect the first portions **160a** with the second portions **160b** in second sections of their longitudinal axes, wherein the first and second sections alternate along the respective longitudinal axis. The first, second and third portions **160a**, **160b**, **160c** of the controls structure **160** are aligned to a bottom plane BPL parallel to the main surface **101a** at a distance $d1$. The separation strips **414** form constricted sections of the semiconductor mesas **420**.

FIGS. **5A** to **5C** refer to an embodiment providing source and body zones of transistor cells in a process layer formed during a heating treatment of a semiconductor substrate **500a** in a hydrogen-containing atmosphere.

In an area assigned to a cell field **610** first trenches **402** are introduced from a process surface **101w** into the semiconductor substrate **500a** that contains at least a base portion **100a**. An edge area **690** may be provided between neighboring cell fields **610**.

FIG. **5A** shows a portion of a cell field **610** with first trenches **402** and a portion of an edge area **690** without trenches. The vertical cross-sectional area of the first trenches **402** may be a rectangle such that first mesas **412** between neighboring first trenches **402** have approximately vertical sidewalls. According to other embodiments, the width $w1$ of the first trenches **402** in a distance to the process surface **101w** may be greater than along the process surface **101w**. For example, the cross-sectional area of the first trenches **402** may be a trapezium and the width $w1$ of the first trenches **402** increases steadily with increasing distance to the process surface **101w**. According to other embodiments, the sidewalls of the first trenches **402** may have bulges such that the cross-sectional areas are bottle-shaped.

The first trenches **402** may have uniform widths and may be regularly arranged at uniform center-to-center distances. According to other embodiments, the widths of the first trenches **402** and/or their center-to-center distances may vary within each cell field. For example, the widths of the first trenches **402** may decrease with decreasing distance to the edges of the cell field to reduce the sharpness of topography effects as explained below.

The semiconductor substrate **500a** is subjected to a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient. The semiconductor material of the base portion **100a** becomes viscous and closes the first trenches **402**.

FIG. **5B** shows the closed first trenches of FIG. **5A** forming cavities **404**. Separation strips **414** separate neighboring cavities **404**. In the cell field **610** a contiguous process layer **415** is formed from the semiconductor material of the first mesas **412** in the cell field **610**. The material flow into portions of the former first trenches **402** results in a step **417** between the modified process surface **101x** in the cell field **610** and the original process surface **101w** in the edge area **690**.

FIG. **5B** shows the step **417** in a transition region **691** between the cell field **610** and the edge area **690**. A height s of the step **417** depends on a ratio between the volume of a portion of the first mesas **412** contributing to the process layer **415** and the volume of the filled portions of the first trenches **402** and may range from 5 nm to 1 μm , by way of example. The thickness of the process layer **415** may range from 20 nm to 3 μm , for example from 100 nm to 2 μm .

In a portion of the edge area **690**, for example in a kerf area, auxiliary cavities may be formed from further first

trenches, wherein the further first trenches are designed such that a significant step results from the heating treatment in the modified process surface **101w**. The step delivers a high contrast for an alignment tool and may be used to precisely align further photolithographic masks to the cavities **404**.

Then transistor cells TC may be formed, wherein the source and body zones **110**, **115** of the transistor cells TC are exclusively formed in semiconductor mesas **420**. According to the illustrated embodiment, a semiconductor mesa **420** includes one of the separation strips **414** and a second mesa **416** formed from a portion of the process layer **415** between neighboring control structures **160**. As regards the formation of the control structures **160**, further doped regions, and load electrodes, reference is made to the detailed description of FIG. **1E**.

FIG. **5C** shows a portion of a semiconductor device **500** which is based on a semiconductor die obtained by singularizing a plurality of identical semiconductor dies from the semiconductor substrate **500a** of FIGS. **5A** and **5B**.

Transistor cells TC include source zones **110** of a first conductivity type and body zones **115** of a second conductivity type, wherein the source and body zones **110**, **115** are formed in a semiconductor mesa **420**, which is a portion of a semiconductor body **100** with a first surface **101** and a parallel second surface **102**. Control structures **160**, which may include gate structures G and field electrode structures F, include top portions **160o** and bottom portions **160p**, respectively. Two top portions **160o** are arranged on opposing sides of a top section **420a** of an intermediate semiconductor mesa **420**, respectively, and extend from the first surface **101** into the semiconductor body **100**. The bottom portions **160p** formed in a distance to the first surface **101** on opposing sides of a bottom section **420b** of the intermediate semiconductor mesa **420**, wherein the top and bottom sections **420a**, **420b** of the semiconductor mesa **420** directly adjoin to each other.

Along a horizontal longitudinal extension, variations of an effective width of the bottom section **420b** of a semiconductor mesa **420** are independent from variations of an effective width of the top section **420a** of the same semiconductor mesa **420**. Accordingly, along the horizontal longitudinal extension, variations of a width of a bottom portion **160p** of a control structure **160** are independent from variations of a width of the top portion **160o** of the same control structure **160**. The bottom portions **160p** of neighboring control structures **160** are isolated from each other and may be arranged along two parallel lines. A distance between the top portions **160o** of neighboring control structures **160** may be greater than a distance between the bottom portions **160p** of the concerned control structures **160**.

The cavities **404** of the transistor cells TC as well as the process layer **415** for the source and body zones **110**, **115** of the transistor cells TC may be formed at the beginning of the processing of the semiconductor substrate **500a** before any heat sensitive structures are formed in or on the semiconductor substrate **500a**.

According to another embodiment, the cavities **404** as well as the process layer **415** for the source and body zones **110**, **115** are formed at a processing stage with at least one heat sensitive structure already formed in the semiconductor substrate **500a**.

The process illustrated in FIGS. **6A** to **6C** differs from the process illustrated in FIGS. **5A** to **5C** in that a semiconductor oxide structure **240** is formed at the main surface **101a** before the process layer **415** for the source and body zones **110**, **115** is formed.

For example, before or after forming the first trenches **402** a semiconductor oxide structure **240** may be formed along the process surface **101x**. The semiconductor oxide structure **240** may be formed, for example, by patterning an oxidation mask layer, e.g., a silicon nitride or silicon oxynitride layer and then controlling a thermal oxidation of an exposed section of the base portion **100a** in openings of the oxidation mask. According to other embodiments, a first shallow trench may be etched into the process surface **101x** and the semiconductor oxide is formed in the shallow trench. The depth of the shallow trench may be selected such that after incorporating the oxygen, the upper edge of the grown semiconductor oxide is approximately flush with the process surface **101x**.

Since the formation of the transistor cells TC gets along without epitaxial growth, the thermal budget applied for forming the transistor cells TC is low enough to avoid damaging previously fabricated structures like the semiconductor oxide structure **240**.

The same semiconductor oxide structure **240** may be used for aligning the photolithographic masks for forming the first and second trenches **402**, **406** as well as further photolithographic masks.

FIGS. **7A** to **7B** refer to first mesas **412** with wide mesa sections **412x** adjoining the process surface **101w** and mainly contributing to the formation of a process layer **415** as well as with narrow mesa sections **412y** mainly contributing to the formation of separation strips **414**.

First trenches **402** are introduced from a process surface **101w** into a semiconductor substrate **500a** including a base portion **100a** from a semiconductor material. For example, a first etch may be performed with increasingly anisotropic component such that the width of the first trenches **402** increases with increasing distance to the process surface **101w**. Alternatively, a two or more step etch process may be performed to widen previously formed narrow trenches **402** with straight sidewalls.

FIG. **7A** shows bottle-shaped first trenches **402** with wide trench portions **402y** in a distance to the process surface **101w** and narrow trench portions **402x** between the process surface **101w** and the wide trench portions **402y**. The narrow trench portions **402x** correspond to wide mesa portions **412x** and the wide trench portions **402y** correspond to narrow mesa portions **412y** of the first mesas **412**.

The semiconductor substrate **500a** is subjected to a heating treatment in a hydrogen-containing ambient resulting in that the semiconductor material becomes viscous and occludes the first trenches **402**.

FIG. **7B** shows the closed cavities **404** emerging from the first trenches **402** of FIG. **7A**. A thickness of the resulting process layer **415** covering the cavities **404** may be adjusted by selecting an appropriate vertical extension dx of the wide mesa portions **412x**. Due to the high volume ratio of wide mesa portions **412x** to narrow trench portions **402x** a height s of a step **417** in a transition region **691** between the cell field **610** and an edge area **690** is comparatively low.

The process may proceed with forming second trenches opening the cavities **404**, forming control structures in the second trenches as well as in the cavities **404**, and forming source and drain zones of transistor cells in the process layer **415** as described with reference to FIGS. **1E** and **6C**.

Forming the control structures includes depositing one or more conductive materials filling at least partially the second trenches and the cavities **404**. After deposition of the conductive material(s), material deposited on a modified process surface **101x** of the process layer **415** is removed, for example using a polishing step such as CMP (chemical

mechanical polishing). The polishing stops at the upper edge of the base portion **100a**, i.e., the original process surface **101w**. Remnant portions of the deposited conductive materials fill a shallow trough **418** above the cell field **610**. An isotropic etch may remove the conductive material filling the trough **418** without consuming material deposited into the second trenches. The shallower the trough **418** is the better is the control of the isotropic etch.

Along the longitudinal axes, the second trenches may be formed analogously to the first trenches and the cavities.

FIGS. **8A** to **10B** refer to embodiments decoupling the longitudinal pattern of the second trenches from the longitudinal pattern of the first trenches.

In FIG. **8A** the cavities **404** have a uniform width **wc1** along their longitudinal axes. The second trenches **406** have narrow second trench sections **406x** alternating with wide second trench sections **406z** along their longitudinal axes. Narrow second mesa sections **416z** correspond to wide second trench sections **406z** and wide second mesa sections **416x** correspond to narrow second trench sections **406x**. Control structures **160** are formed in the second trenches **406** and the cavities **404**.

As illustrated in FIG. **8B**, the control structures **160** narrow portions of the semiconductor mesas **420** in the narrow second mesa sections **416z** including portions of the body zones **115** separating isolated source zones **110** from each other. Top portions **160o** of the control structures **160** include first top portions **160x** having a first top width **wt1** and second top portions **160y** having a second top width **wt2** greater than the first top width **wt1**. The first and second top portions **160x**, **160y** directly adjoin to each other and alternate along the horizontal longitudinal extension of the respective top portion **160a**. The source zones **110** may be formed within the wide second mesa sections **416x** sandwiched between opposing first top portions **160a** of the two neighboring control structures **160**, respectively.

In FIG. **9A** the narrow second mesa sections **416z** include constrictions sufficiently narrow such that the narrowed second mesa sections are completely through-oxidized at the constrictions during formation of the control dielectric **161** as illustrated in FIG. **9B**.

According to FIG. **10A** the second trenches **406** include stripe trenches **406a** and hole trenches **406b**, which may be contemporaneously formed in the same patterning process. The stripe trenches **406a** run parallel to the first trenches **404** and may expose some or all of them. The hole trenches **406b** extend from the first surface **101a** of the semiconductor substrate **500a** into the second mesas **416**. A width of the hole trenches **406b** may be selected such that in a following oxidation step semiconductor fins between the hole trenches **406b** and the stripe trenches **406a** are completely through oxidized. According to other embodiments, the width of the hole trenches **406b** is selected such that in the finalized device narrow semiconductor fins remain between structures resulting from a fill of the hole trenches **406b** and structures resulting from a fill of the stripe trenches **406a**. A vertical extension of the hole trenches **406b** is smaller than a vertical extension of the stripe trenches **406a**. Control structures **160** are formed in and along the stripe and hole trenches **406a**, **406b** of FIG. **10A**.

FIG. **10B** shows the control structures **160** including top portions **160o** in the stripe trenches **406a** of FIG. **10A** and intermediate portions **160q** in the hole trenches **406b** of FIG. **10A**. The top and intermediate portions **160o**, **160q** may directly adjoin to each other such that the top portions **160o** separate upper portions of the second mesas **416**, respectively. According to other embodiments, narrow semicon-

ductor fins may separate the intermediate portions **160q** from the top portions **160o** of the control structures **160**. A vertical extension of the intermediate portions **160q** is smaller than a vertical extension of the top portions **160o**. The intermediate portions **160q** may include the same materials and may have the same layer configuration as the top portions **160o**. A conductive material of the intermediate portions **160q** may float or may be electrically connected to a conductive material of one of the top portions **160o**. The intermediate portions **160q** effectively reduce a lateral conductivity in the top sections **420a** of the semiconductor mesas **420**. An effective width of the top sections **420a** varies along the longitudinal axis of the concerned semiconductor mesa **420**.

FIG. 10C refers to an embodiment based on a variation of the widths of the bottom portions **160p** of the control structures **160** along the longitudinal direction in combination with at least one pair of intermediate portions **160q** as described with reference to FIG. 10B.

The widths of the bottom portions **160p** of two neighboring control structures **160** are modified such that between a pair of bottom portions **160p** instead of a separating strip **414** a pure semiconductor oxide structure **414z** separates the bottom portions **160p** of the two concerned control structures **160** at least between the pair of intermediate portions **160q**. The top section **420a** of the concerned semiconductor mesa **420** includes a completely insulated semiconductor section **190**. In the semiconductor section **190** one or more semiconductor elements such as a thermal diode, a sense transistor, etc. The mode of operation of semiconductor elements formed in the semiconductor section **190** is completely unaffected from the operation mode and operation conditions of transistor cells formed in the semiconductor mesas **420**.

According to the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 11A lines of isolated second trenches **406** are assigned to the same cavity **404**, respectively.

FIG. 11B illustrates the resulting control structures **150** embedded in second mesas **416** connected to each other.

In the preceding embodiments the shape of the second trenches **406** does not completely reproduce the shape of the cavities **404**. The second trenches **406** are designed to supply sufficient material and process fluids into the cavities **404** for reliable formation of the control dielectric **161** and the control electrode **165**.

FIG. 12 summarizes a method of manufacturing a semiconductor device according to the embodiments. First trenches are formed that extend from a process surface into a semiconductor substrate, which is provided from a semiconductor material (**902**). The semiconductor substrate is heated in a hydrogen-containing ambient, wherein a portion of the semiconductor material at the process surface fluidifies and forms a contiguous process layer spanning cavities based on the first trenches (**904**). Source and body zones of transistor cells are formed in a top semiconductor layer including at least the process layer (**906**). Before or after forming the source and/or body zones, second trenches are formed that extend through the top semiconductor layer and that expose at least first ones of the cavities (**908**).

FIGS. 13A and 13B refer to a semiconductor device **510** whose pedestal layer **130** has the same conductivity type as a drift zone **121**. The semiconductor device **510** may be an IGFET (insulated gate field effect transistor) or a desaturable semiconductor diode.

A single-crystalline semiconductor material, for example silicon (Si), silicon carbide (SiC), germanium (Ge), a silicon germanium crystal (SiGe), gallium nitride (GaN), or another

$A_{III}B_V$ semiconductor forms a semiconductor body **100** with a first surface **101**, which may be approximately planar or which may be defined by a plane spanned by coplanar surface sections, as well as a planar second surface **102** parallel to the first surface **101**.

A minimum distance between the first and second surfaces **101**, **102** depends on a voltage blocking capability the semiconductor device **500** is specified for. For example, the distance between the first and second surfaces **101**, **102** may be in a range from 90 μm to 120 μm for a semiconductor device specified for a blocking voltage of about 1200 V. Other embodiments related to semiconductor devices with higher blocking capabilities may provide semiconductor bodies **100** with a thickness of several 100 μm . Semiconductor devices with low blocking capabilities may have a thickness from 35 μm to 90 μm .

In a plane parallel to the first surface **101** the semiconductor body **100** may have a rectangular shape with an edge length in the range of several millimeters. A normal to the first surface **101** defines a vertical direction and directions orthogonal to the vertical direction are horizontal directions.

The semiconductor body **100** includes a base region **120** with a drift zone **121** of a first conductivity type. A dopant concentration in the drift zone **121** may gradually or in steps increase or decrease with increasing distance to the first surface **101** at least in portions of its vertical extension. According to other embodiments the dopant concentration in the drift zone **121** may be approximately uniform. A mean dopant concentration in the drift zone **121** may be between $5\text{E}12\text{ cm}^{-3}$ and $1\text{E}15\text{ cm}^{-3}$, for example from $1\text{E}13\text{ cm}^{-3}$ to $1\text{E}14\text{ cm}^{-3}$. In case the semiconductor device **510** is based on SiC, a mean impurity concentration in the drift zone **121** may be between $5\text{E}14\text{ cm}^{-3}$ and $1\text{E}17\text{ cm}^{-3}$, e.g., in a range from $1\text{E}15\text{ cm}^{-3}$ to $1\text{E}16\text{ cm}^{-3}$.

The base region **120** may further include a field stop layer **128** of the first conductivity type between the drift zone **121** and the second surface **102**. A mean net impurity concentration in the field stop layer **128** may exceed the mean net impurity concentration in the drift zone **121** by at least one order of magnitude. The base region **120** may include further doped zones, for example, zones forming a compensation structure, barrier zones for locally increasing a charge carrier plasma density and/or buffer layers.

A pedestal layer **130** is sandwiched between the base region **120** and the second surface **102**. The pedestal layer **130** directly adjoins the second surface **102** and may directly adjoin the drift zone **121** or, if applicable, the field stop layer **128**, by way of example.

In the illustrated embodiment referring to IGFETs and desaturable semiconductor diodes, the pedestal layer **130** is a contiguous layer of the first conductivity type. A dopant concentration in the pedestal layer **130** is sufficiently high to form an ohmic contact with a metal directly adjoining the second surface **102**. In case the semiconductor body **100** is based on silicon (Si), a maximum dopant concentration for an n-type emitter layer **130** may be at least $1\text{E}18\text{ cm}^{-3}$, for example at least $6\text{E}19\text{ cm}^{-3}$.

Control structures including gate structures **150** are formed in a portion of the semiconductor body **100** oriented to the first surface **101**. The gate structures **150** include first portions **150a** extending from the first surface **101** into the drift zone **121** up to a bottom plane BPL parallel to the first surface **101**. Second portions **150b** are formed between neighboring first portions **150a**, wherein in first sections along a longitudinal axis perpendicular to the cross-sectional plane portions of the semiconductor body **100** form separation strips **414** that locally separate neighboring first and

second portions **150a**, **150b** along a horizontal direction. In second sections along the longitudinal axis of the first portions **150a** third portions **150c** laterally connect the first and second portions **150a**, **150b**. A distance between the first surface **101** and the bottom plane BPL may range from 1 μm to 30 μm , e.g., from 3 μm to 7 μm . The gate structures **150** may include a conductive gate electrode **155**, which may include or consist of a heavily doped polycrystalline layer, a metal-containing layer, or both. The gate electrodes **155** may be electrically coupled or connected to a gate terminal G of the semiconductor device **510**.

According to other embodiments the control structures may include further control electrodes electrically insulated from the gate electrodes **155** and electrically connected to a potential different to that of the gate terminal G. A gate dielectric **151** separates the respective gate electrode **155** from the semiconductor body **100** and capacitively couples the gate electrode **155** to adjoining portions of the semiconductor body **100**.

The gate structures **150** pattern a section of the drift zone **121** oriented to the first surface **101** such that the drift zone **121** includes a plurality of first drift zone sections **121a** in semiconductor mesas **420** formed between neighboring gate structures **150** as well as a contiguous second drift zone section **121b** in a portion of the semiconductor body **100** between the bottom plane BPL and the second surface **102**. A dielectric structure **205** may electrically insulate the gate electrodes **150** from conductive structures outside the semiconductor body **100**.

The semiconductor mesas **420** between the gate structures **150** are formed from portions of the semiconductor body **100** and include second mesas **416** between neighboring first portions **150a** of the gate structure **150** as well as the separating strips **414** between neighboring first and second portions **150a**, **150b**.

In the semiconductor mesas **420** body zones **115** of a second conductivity type opposite to the first conductivity type are formed between the first surface **101** and the first drift zone sections **121a**, respectively. The body zones **115** form first pn junctions pn1 with the first drift zone sections **121a**. The body zones **115** are electrically connected or coupled to a first load terminal L1 of the semiconductor device **510**.

In case the semiconductor device **510** is an IGFET, source zones **110**, which may be formed as wells extending from the first surface **101a** into the semiconductor body may form second pn junctions pn2 with the body zones **115** and the first load terminal L1 is electrically connected to the source zones **110**. In case the semiconductor device **510** is a semiconductor diode, the source zones are absent.

In addition, some of the control electrodes may be electrically connected or coupled to the first load terminal L1. The pedestal layer **130** is electrically connected to a second load terminal L2.

In a portion including the respective first drift zone section **121a** the separating strips **414** are effective as constricted sections of the semiconductor mesas **420**. A constriction width w_c is given by the minimum horizontal width of the first drift zone section **121a** parallel to the first surface **101** in the separating strips **414** and is smaller than a corresponding maximum horizontal body width w_{bz} of the body zones **115**.

The horizontal body width w_{bz} may be between 100 nm and 3 μm , e.g., 150 nm and 1 μm and the constriction width w_c may be at most 50%, for example at most 20% of the horizontal body width w_{bz} . According to an embodiment, the constriction width w_c is in the range from 20 nm to 300

nm. For example, the horizontal body width w_{bz} is about 200 nm and the constriction width w_c may be in a range from 100 nm to 160 nm.

The constriction drastically increases a difference of emitter efficiency between a first state with no inversion layer formed in the drift zone **121** along the control structures **160** and a second state with inversion layers formed along the control structures **160**.

The semiconductor device **510** of FIG. **14** may be an RC-IGBT or a desaturable semiconductor diode.

The pedestal layer **130** includes first zones **131** of the first conductivity type and second zones **132** of the second conductivity type. For desaturable semiconductor diodes the second zones **132** may improve the draining of holes during a reverse recovery mode. For RC-IGBTs the first zones **131** enable the reverse conducting functionality. The dopant concentrations in the first and second zones **131**, **132** are sufficiently high to form ohmic contacts with a metal directly adjoining the second surface **102**. In case the semiconductor body **100** is based on silicon (Si) a dopant concentration in the second zones **132** may be at least $5 \times 10^{16} \text{ cm}^{-3}$, for example at least $1 \times 10^{18} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. For further details, reference is made to the description of FIGS. **13A** and **13B**.

FIG. **15** refers to a non-reverse conducting or reverse blocking IGBT **513** with a contiguous pedestal layer **130** of the second conductivity type. The narrow separating strips suppress a leakage of charge carriers from the drift zone **121** to the first load terminal L1 in an on-state of the IGBT **513**. As regards further details, reference is made to the description of the semiconductor device **510** in FIGS. **11A** and **11B**.

The gate dielectrics **151** of the IGBT **513** of FIG. **16A** include first sections **151a** in bottom sections of the gate structures **150** along the bottom plane BPL and second sections **151b** between the first sections **151a** and the first surface **101**. The first sections **151aa** are thicker, e.g., at least twice as thick as the second sections **151b**. For example, a first thickness of the first sections **151a** is about 100 nm to 500 nm and a second thickness of the second sections **151b** is about 50 nm to 200 nm. The thick first sections **151a** may reduce a capacitive coupling between the gate electrodes **150** and the drift zone **121**.

The control structures **160** of the IGBT **513** in FIG. **16B** include field electrodes **175** in portions oriented to the bottom plane BPL and gate electrodes **155** in portions oriented to the first surface **101**, wherein the gate electrodes **155** are insulated from the field electrodes **175**. According to an embodiment, the field electrodes **175** may fill the second and third portions **160b**, **160c** and bottom portions of the first portions **160a** of the control structures **160**. The field electrodes **175** may be electrically coupled or connected with one of the load terminals L1, L2.

The field dielectrics **171** separating the field electrodes **175** from the semiconductor body **100** may include first sections **171a** in bottom sections of the control structures **160** along the bottom plane BPL and second sections **171b** between the first sections **171a** and the gate electrode **155**. The first sections **171a** are thicker, e.g., at least twice as thick as the second sections **171b**.

The semiconductor mesas **420** of the IGBT **513** in FIG. **16C** include second mesas **416** and three separating strips **414** connected to the same second mesa **416**. Further embodiments may provide more than three separating strips **414** per semiconductor mesa **420**.

FIG. **16D** refers to a semiconductor switching device **514** with a cell area **691** including transistor cells TC and a completely insulated semiconductor section **190** in an auxiliary circuit area **692**. The completely insulated semicon-

ductor section **190** may be formed without additional processes contemporaneously with the transistor cells **TC**, wherein the distances between the first and second portions **160a**, **160b** in the auxiliary circuit area **692** are selected to be closer than in the cell area **691** such that instead of separating strips **414** completely through-oxidized semiconductor oxide structures **414z** are formed between the first and second portions **160a**, **160b**. The semiconductor section **190** may include sense circuits, driver circuits and/or logic circuits, by way of example.

In the auxiliary circuit area **692**, the control structures **160** may be left without fill, maybe filled at least partially with dielectric material, with intrinsic semiconductor material or with a conductive material, which may float or which may be electrically connected or coupled to one of the load terminals **L1**, **L2** or the gate terminal **G**.

FIGS. **17A** and **17B** refer to semiconductor devices **500** with short semiconductor mesas **420** and ring-shaped gate structures **150** surrounding the semiconductor mesas **420** on four horizontal sides, respectively.

The semiconductor mesa **420** may include a second mesa **416** between the first surface **101** and buried second and third portions **150b**, **150c** of the gate structure **150**. The semiconductor mesa **420** further includes four or more separation strips **414** which may be symmetrically arranged with respect to a horizontal center point of the semiconductor mesa **420**. The semiconductor mesa **420** may be defined between two pairs of opposite, straight gate structures **150** forming a ring around the semiconductor mesa. The horizontal cross-sectional area of the second mesa **416** may be a circle, an ellipse, a polygon, e.g., a rectangle or a square with or without rounded corners. The semiconductor device **510** may include a plurality of identical or approximately identical semiconductor mesas **420**.

FIG. **18** refers to an embodiment wherein a width of semiconductor mesas and/or density of semiconductor mesas with different widths vary as a function of a distance between the concerned semiconductor mesa and an edge termination area **198**.

The semiconductor device **500** of FIG. **18** includes narrow first constricted sections **400a** having a first minimum width, respectively and second constricted sections **400b** with second minimum widths, which are greater than the first minimum width. In portions of the semiconductor device **500** including the narrow first constricted sections **400a** the on-state plasma density is higher than in portions including the second constricted sections **400b**.

The first constricted sections **400a** may dominate in a central portion **191a** of an active area **191** of the semiconductor body **100** including transistor cells. The second constricted sections **400b** may be arranged at a higher density in a transition portion **191b** of the active area **191** between the central portion **191a** and an edge termination area **198** without transistor cells between the active area **191** and a lateral surface **103**, which connects the first and second surfaces, or in portions of the active area **191** in whose vertical projection gate pads and gate connections are arranged. Less charge carriers flood the edge termination area **198** during an on-state and less charge carriers have to be removed from the edge termination area **198** when the semiconductor device **500** is switched off. The locally reduced charge carrier plasma density along the edge termination area **198** reduces commutation losses and improves turn-off ruggedness of the semiconductor device **500**.

FIGS. **19A** and **19B** refer to a further embodiment concerning the formation of semiconductor mesas with constricted sections.

A dielectric layer **100x** is formed on a surface of a base substrate **100a** and an opening **199** is formed in the dielectric layer **100x**, e.g., by using a patterned hard mask. An epitaxial layer **100b** having a thickness of at least 2 μm , e.g. 5 μm , is grown, wherein the crystal lattice of the epitaxial layer **100b** locks into that of the exposed portions of the base substrate **100a** as shown in FIG. **19A**. The lateral growth may be improved by a laser-assisted epitaxial lateral overgrowth and/or by a thermal treatment in a hydrogen atmosphere.

In a portion of the epitaxial layer **100b** in the vertical projection of the opening **199** source and body zones **110**, **115** of transistor cells with vertical channels may be formed by introducing the suitable dopants. Control structures **150** may be formed in trenches that extend from the first surface **101** of the semiconductor substrate **500a** including the base substrate **100a** and the epitaxial layer **100b** down to the buried dielectric layer **100x**. The vertical extensions of the gate structures **150** as well as that of constricted portions of the drift zone **120** in the openings **199** are well defined and exhibit high uniformity across the semiconductor substrate **500a**.

Another embodiment refers to a semiconductor device including transistor cells that include source zones of a first conductivity type and body zones of a second conductivity type, wherein the source and body zones are formed in a semiconductor mesa formed from a portion of a semiconductor body. The semiconductor device further includes a control structure that includes top portions arranged on two opposing sides of the semiconductor mesa and extending from a first surface into the semiconductor body, and bottom portions in a distance to the first surface, wherein each bottom portion is connected to the top portions arranged along the same line and along a horizontal longitudinal extension variations of a width of the bottom portion are independent from variations of a width of the top portion.

According to an embodiment, the top portions may be isolated from each other and are arranged along two parallel lines on two opposing sides of the semiconductor mesa.

According to an embodiment, each top portion may include first top portions having a first width and second top portions having a second width greater than the first width, the first and second top portions directly adjoining to each other and alternating along the horizontal longitudinal extension of the respective top portion.

According to a further embodiment, the source zones may be formed in portions of the semiconductor mesa between opposing first top portions of the two control structures.

Although specific embodiments have been illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that a variety of alternate and/or equivalent implementations may be substituted for the specific embodiments shown and described without departing from the scope of the present invention. This application is intended to cover any adaptations or variations of the specific embodiments discussed herein. Therefore, it is intended that this invention be limited only by the claims and the equivalents thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A semiconductor device, comprising:

transistor cells including source zones of a first conductivity type and body zones of a second conductivity type, wherein the source and body zones are formed in a semiconductor mesa formed from a portion of a semiconductor body; and
control structures that comprise first portions extending from a first surface into the semiconductor body on at least two opposing sides of the semiconductor mesa,

second portions at a distance to the first surface between the first portions and separated, from the first surface and from the first portions, by portions of the semiconductor mesa, and third portions at a distance to the first surface, connecting the first and the second portions, and separated from the first surface by portions of the semiconductor mesa, wherein constricted sections of the semiconductor mesa separate third portions neighboring each other along a horizontal longitudinal extension of the semiconductor mesa.

2. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the first, second, and third portions are aligned to a bottom plane at a first distance to the first surface.

3. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the control structures comprise at least a first control electrode and a first control dielectric separating the first control electrode from the semiconductor body.

4. The semiconductor device of claim 3, wherein the control dielectric has a first section with a first thickness in a bottom portion averted from the first surface and a second section with a second thickness smaller than the first thickness between the first section and the first surface.

5. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the control structures comprise fourth portions extending into the semiconductor body on further two opposing sides of the semiconductor mesa.

6. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the control structure includes a first control electrode in the second portions, the third portions, and in a bottom section of the first portions, and a second control electrode dielectrically separated from the first control electrode in a top section of the first portion between the first surface and the bottom section.

7. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein the semiconductor mesa further comprises further constricted sections between neighboring ones of the second portions.

8. The semiconductor device of claim 1, wherein a width and/or density of the constricted sections varies as a function of a distance between the concerned constricted section and an edge area of the semiconductor body, wherein the edge area is devoid of transistor cells and surrounds a cell field including the transistor cells.

9. A semiconductor device, comprising:
transistor cells comprising source zones of a first conductivity type and body zones of a second conductivity

type, wherein the source and body zones are formed in a semiconductor mesa formed from a portion of a semiconductor body; and
control structures that comprise top portions arranged on two opposing sides of a top section of the semiconductor mesa and extending from a first surface into the semiconductor body, and bottom portions in a distance to the first surface on opposing sides of a bottom section of the semiconductor mesa, wherein the bottom section of the semiconductor mesa is connected to the top section, wherein at least one of the top and bottom horizontal sections show a variation of an effective width along a horizontal longitudinal extension of the semiconductor mesa and wherein, in case both the top and the bottom horizontal sections show a variation of an effective width along the horizontal longitudinal extension of the semiconductor mesa, variations of an effective width of the bottom section and variations of an effective width of the top section are not geometrically similar.

10. The semiconductor device of claim 9, wherein the bottom portions of the control structures are isolated from each other and are arranged along two parallel lines.

11. The semiconductor device of claim 9, wherein at least one of the top portions of the control structure includes first top portions having a first top width and second top portions having a second top width greater than the first width, the first and second top portions directly adjoining to each other and alternating along the horizontal longitudinal extension of the semiconductor mesa.

12. The semiconductor device of claim 11, wherein the source zones are formed in portions of the semiconductor mesa between opposing first top portions of the two control structures.

13. The semiconductor device of claim 9, wherein the control structure comprises intermediate portions arranged between the top portions and spaced from the top portions of the control structure, a vertical extension of the intermediate portions being smaller than a vertical extension of the top portions of the control structure.

14. The semiconductor device of claim 9, wherein a distance between the top portions of neighboring ones of the control structures is greater than a distance between the bottom portions of neighboring ones of the control structures.

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