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EE C247B – ME C218
Introduction to MEMS Design
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Lecture Module 6: Bulk Micromachining

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Lecture Outline

- Reading: Senturia Chpt. 3, Jaeger Chpt. 11, Handouts: "Bulk Micromachining of Silicon"
- Lecture Topics:
  - Bulk Micromachining
  - Anisotropic Etching of Silicon
  - Boron-Doped Etch Stop
  - Electrochemical Etch Stop
  - Isotropic Etching of Silicon
  - Deep Reactive Ion Etching (DRIE)
  - Wafer Bonding

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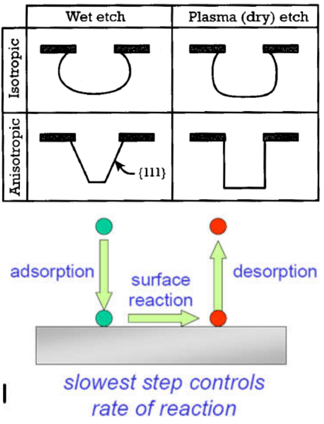
Bulk Micromachining

- Basically, etching the substrate (usually silicon) to achieve microstructures
- Etching modes:
  - Isotropic vs. anisotropic
  - Reaction-limited
    - Etch rate dep. on temp.
  - Diffusion-limited
    - Etch rate dep. on mixing
    - Also dependent on layout & geometry, i.e., on loading
- Choose etch mode based on
  - Desired shape
  - Etch depth and uniformity
  - Surface roughness (e.g., sidewall roughness after etching)
  - Process compatiblity (w/ existing layers)
  - Safety, cost, availability, environmental impact



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Mechanical Properties of Silicon

- Crystalline silicon is a hard and brittle material that deforms elastically until it reaches its yield strength,at which point it breaks.
  - Tensile yield strength = 7 GPa (~1500 lb suspended from 1 mm^2)
  - Young's Modulus near that of stainless steel
  - {100} = 130 GPa; {110} = 169 GPa; {111} = 188 GPa
  - Mechanical properties uniform, no intrinsic stress
  - Mechanical integrity up to 500°C
  - Good thermal conductor
  - Low thermal expansion coefficient
  - High piezoresistivity

Anisotropic Wet Etching

Anisotropic etches are available for single crystal Si:

↳ Orientation-dependent etching: <111>-plane more densely packed than <100>-plane

Slower E.R.

Faster E.R.

…in some solvents

One such solvent: KOH + isopropyl alcohol

(e.g., 23.4 wt% KOH, 13.3 wt% isopropyl alcohol, 63 wt% H_2O)

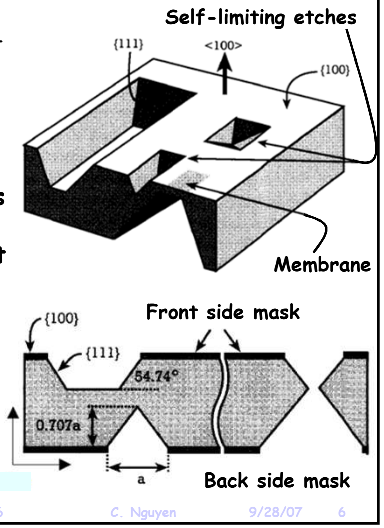
$\Longrightarrow$ $E.R._{<100>} = 100 \times E.R._{<111>}$

Anisotropic Etching of Silicon

- Etching of Si w/ KOH

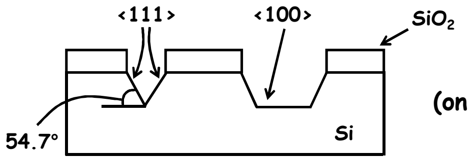
  $Si + 2OH^- \rightarrow Si(OH)_2^{2+} + 4e^-$

  $4H_2O + 4e^- \rightarrow 4(OH)^- + 2H_2$
- Crystal orientation dependent etch rates
  - ↳ {110}:{100}:{111}=600:400:1
  - ↳ {100} and {110} have 2 bonds below the surface & 2 dangling bonds that can react
  - ↳ {111} plane has three of its bonds below the surface & only one dangling bond to react → much slower E.R.
  - ↳ {111} forms protective oxide
  - ↳ {111} smoother than other crystal planes → good for optical MEMS (mirrors)

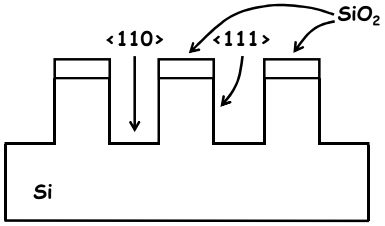


Anisotropic Wet Etching (cont.)

Can get the following:



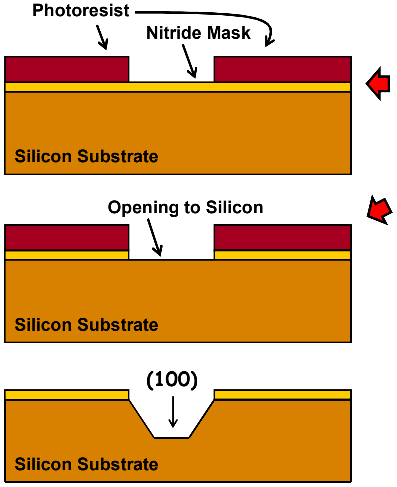
(on a <100> - wafer)



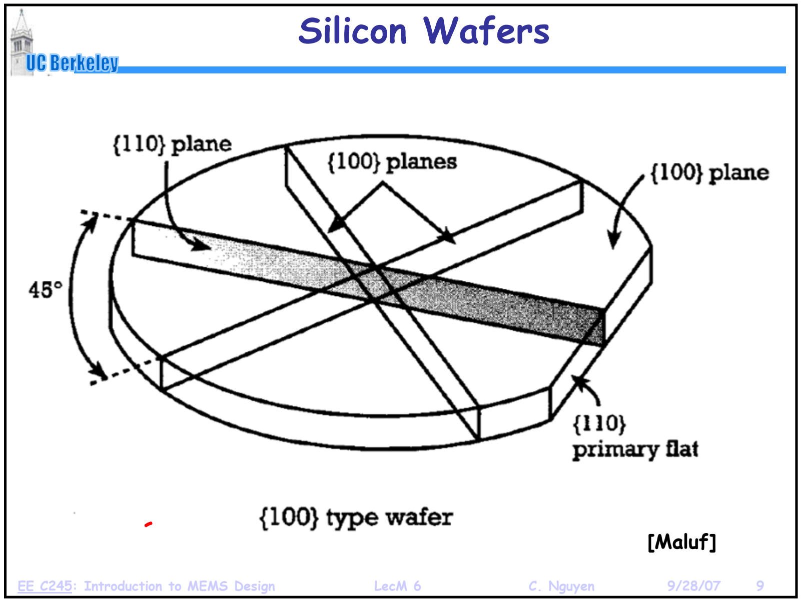
(on a <110> - wafer)

$\Longrightarrow$ Quite anisotropic!

Anisotropic Wet Etching of Silicon



- Deposit nitride:
  - ↳ Target = 100nm
  - ↳ 22 min. LPCVD @800°C
- Lithography to define areas of silicon to be etched
- Etch/pattern nitride mask
  - ↳ RIE using SF_6
  - ↳ Remove PR in PRS2000
- Etch the silicon
  - ↳ Use 1:2 KOH:H_2O (wt.), stirred bath @ 80°C
  - ↳ Etch Rates:
    - ☛ (100) Si → 1.4 μm/min
    - ☛ Si_3N_4 → ~ 0 nm/min
    - ☛ SiO_2 → 1-10 nm/min
    - ☛ Photoresist, Al → fast
- Micromasking by H_2 bubbles leads to roughness
  - ↳ Stir well to displace bubbles
  - ↳ Can also use oxidizer for (111) surfaces
  - ↳ Or surfactant additives to suppress bubble formation



Silicon Wafers

[Maluf]

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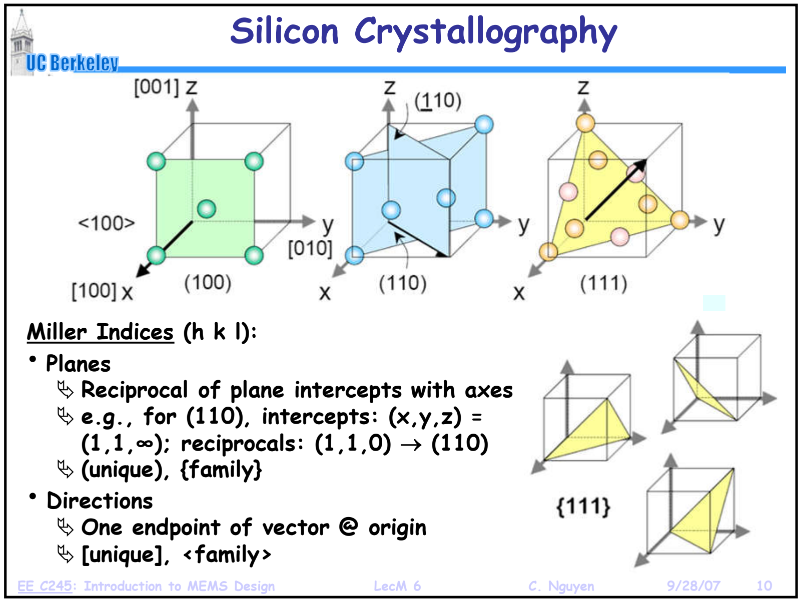

Silicon Crystallography

Miller Indices (h k l):

- Planes
  - Reciprocal of plane intercepts with axes
  - e.g., for (110), intercepts: (x,y,z) = (1,1,∞); reciprocals: (1,1,0) → (110)
  - (unique), {family}
- Directions
  - One endpoint of vector @ origin
  - [unique], <family>

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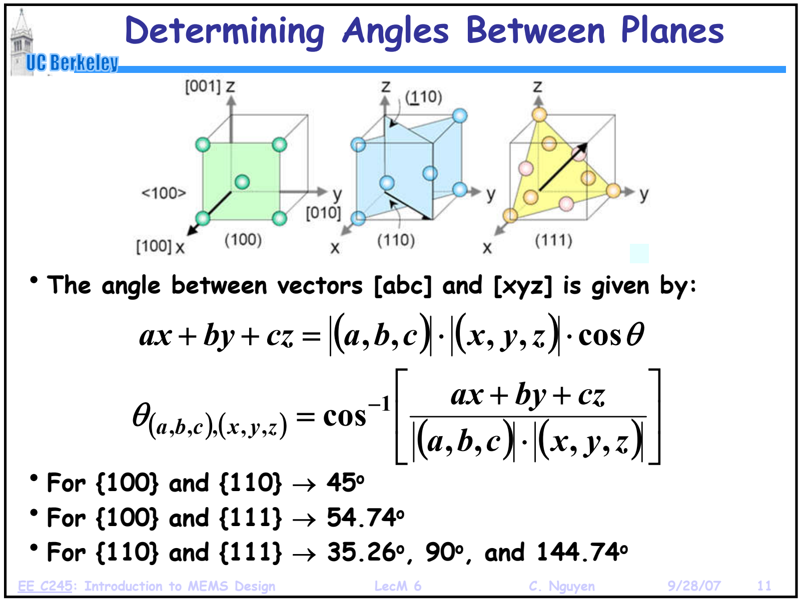

Determining Angles Between Planes

- The angle between vectors [abc] and [xyz] is given by:

$$ax + by + cz = |(a,b,c)| \cdot |(x,y,z)| \cdot \cos\theta$$

$$\theta_{(a,b,c),(x,y,z)} = \cos^{-1}\left[\frac{ax+by+cz}{|(a,b,c)| \cdot |(x,y,z)|}\right]$$

- For {100} and {110} → 45°
- For {100} and {111} → 54.74°
- For {110} and {111} → 35.26°, 90°, and 144.74°

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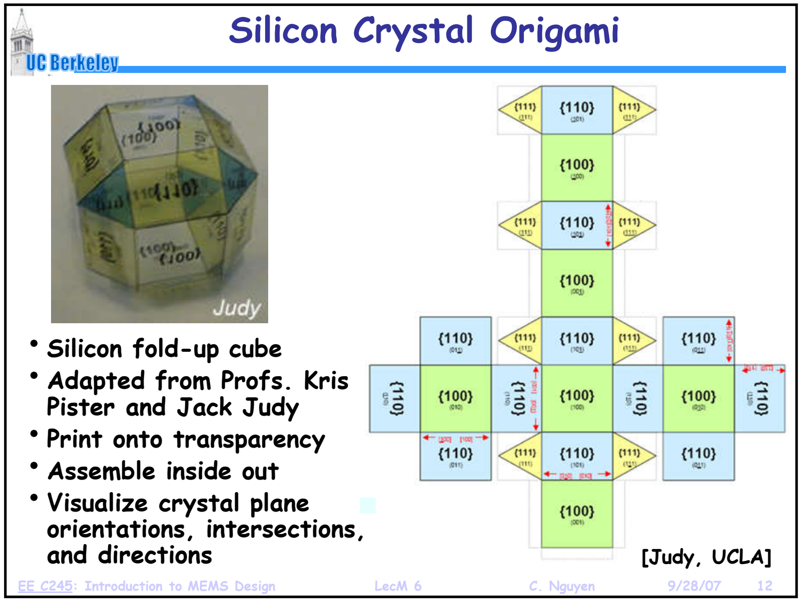

Silicon Crystal Origami

- Silicon fold-up cube
- Adapted from Profs. Kris Pister and Jack Judy
- Print onto transparency
- Assemble inside out
- Visualize crystal plane orientations, intersections, and directions

[Judy, UCLA]

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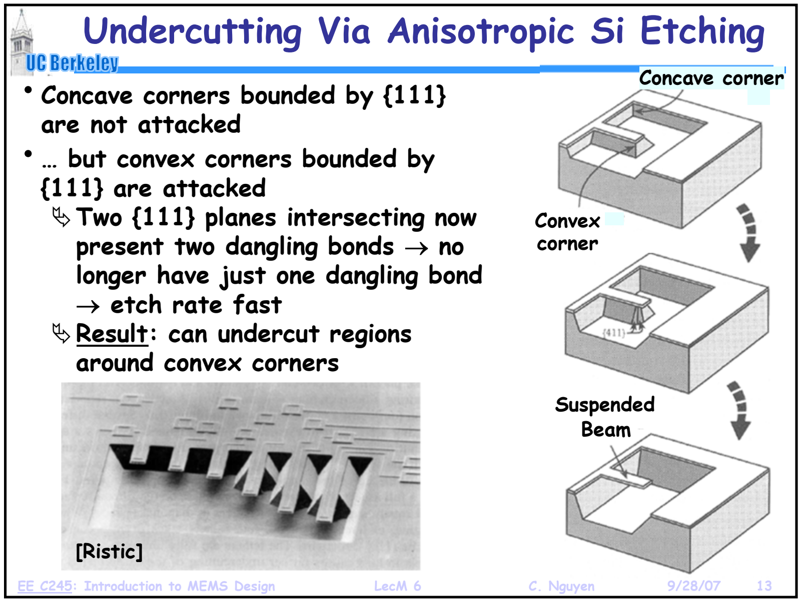

Undercutting Via Anisotropic Si Etching

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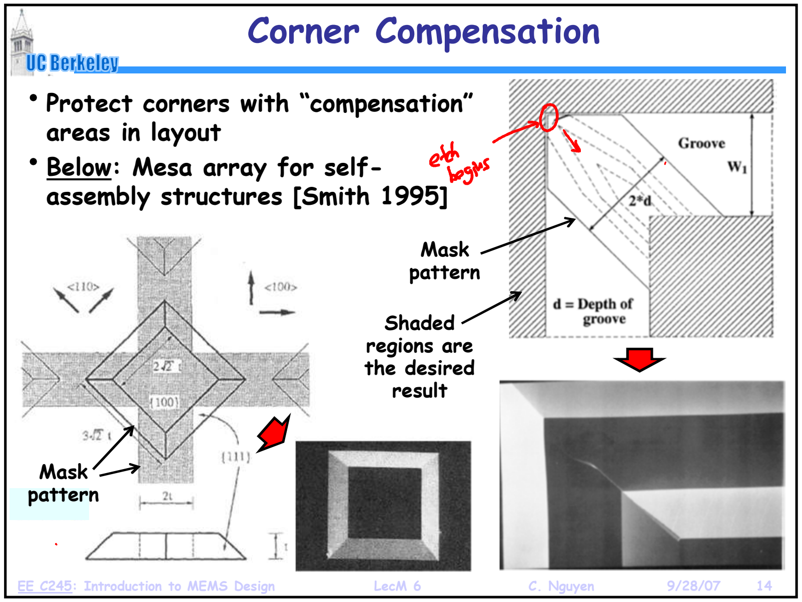
- Concave corners bounded by {111} are not attacked
- … but convex corners bounded by {111} are attacked
  - Two {111} planes intersecting now present two dangling bonds → no longer have just one dangling bond → etch rate fast
  - **Result**: can undercut regions around convex corners



Corner Compensation

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- Protect corners with "compensation" areas in layout
- **Below**: Mesa array for self-assembly structures [Smith 1995]

etch begins

Other Anisotropic Silicon Etchants

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- TMAH, Tetramethyl ammonium hydroxide, 10-40 wt.% (90°C)
  - Etch rate (100) = 0.5-1.5 μm/min
  - Attacks Al
    - Si-doped Al safe & IC compatible
  - Etch ratio (100)/(111) = 10-35
  - Etch masks: SiO_2 , Si_3N_4 ~ 0.05-0.25 nm/min
  - Boron doped etch stop, up to 40× slower
- EDP (115°C)
  - Carcinogenic, corrosive
  - Etch rate (100) = 0.75 μm/min
  - Al may be etched
  - R(100) > R(110) > R(111)
  - Etch ratio (100)/(111) = 35
  - Etch masks: SiO_2 ~ 0.2 nm/min, Si_3N_4 ~ 0.1 nm/min
  - Boron doped etch stop, 50× slower

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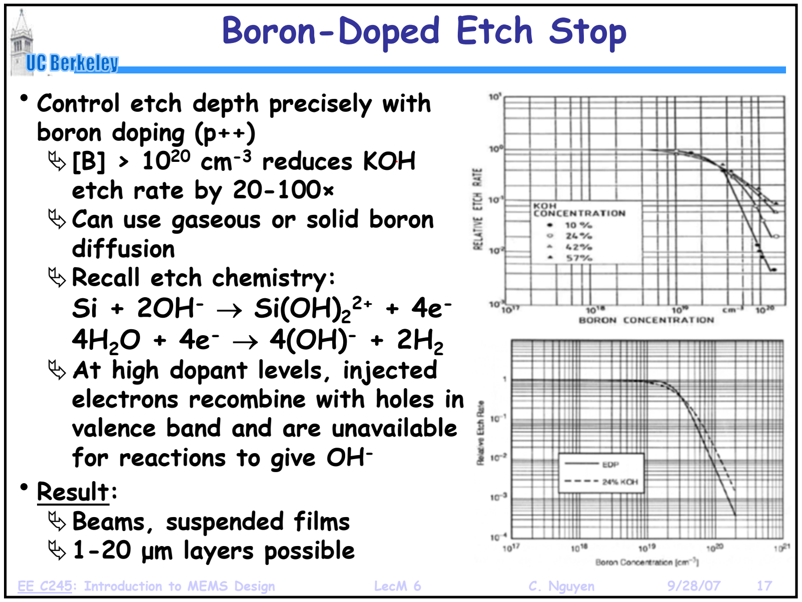
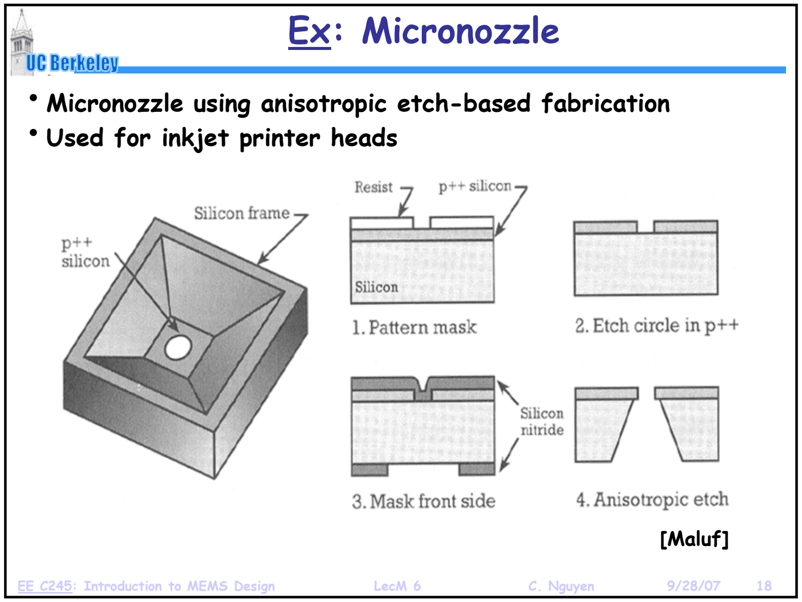
Boron-Doped Etch Stop



Boron-Doped Etch Stop

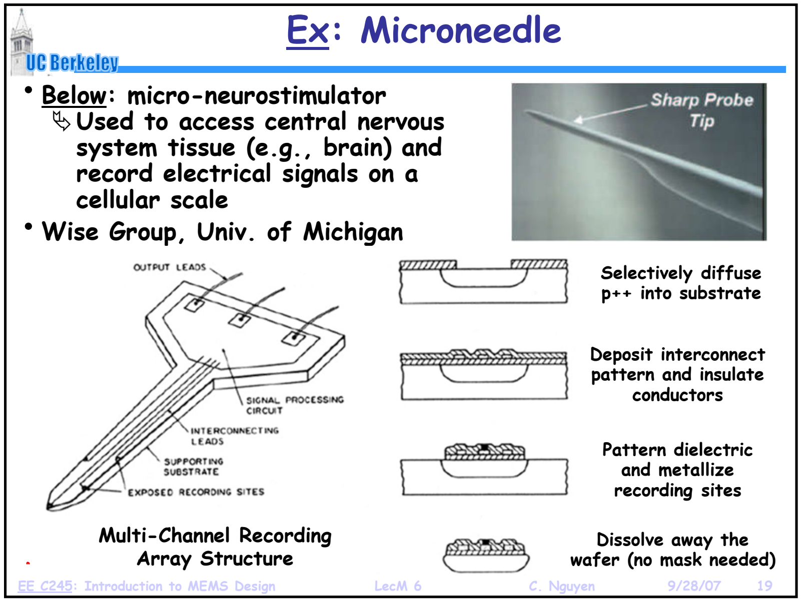
- Control etch depth precisely with boron doping (p++)
  - [B] > 10^{20} cm^{-3} reduces KOH etch rate by 20-100×
  - Can use gaseous or solid boron diffusion
  - Recall etch chemistry:
    $Si + 2OH^- \rightarrow Si(OH)_2^{2+} + 4e^-$
    $4H_2O + 4e^- \rightarrow 4(OH)^- + 2H_2$
  - At high dopant levels, injected electrons recombine with holes in valence band and are unavailable for reactions to give OH^-
- Result:
  - Beams, suspended films
  - 1-20 μm layers possible



Ex: Micronozzle

- Micronozzle using anisotropic etch-based fabrication
- Used for inkjet printer heads

[Maluf]



Ex: Microneedle

- Below: micro-neurostimulator
  - Used to access central nervous system tissue (e.g., brain) and record electrical signals on a cellular scale
- Wise Group, Univ. of Michigan

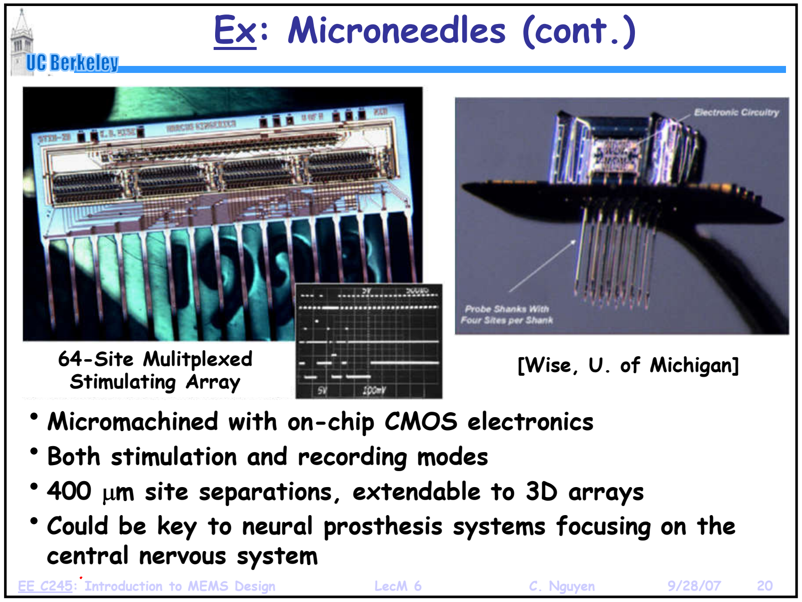
Multi-Channel Recording Array Structure

Selectively diffuse p++ into substrate

Deposit interconnect pattern and insulate conductors

Pattern dielectric and metallize recording sites

Dissolve away the wafer (no mask needed)



Ex: Microneedles (cont.)

64-Site Mulitplexed Stimulating Array

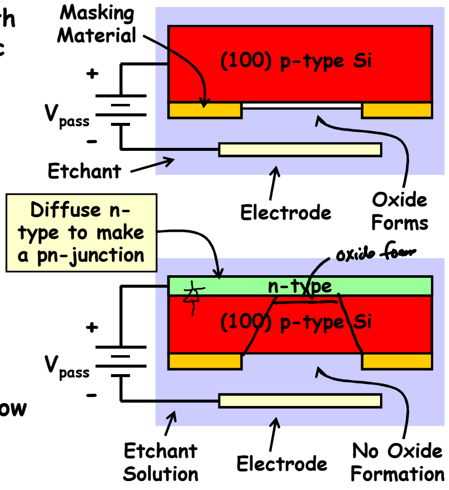
[Wise, U. of Michigan]

- Micromachined with on-chip CMOS electronics
- Both stimulation and recording modes
- 400 μm site separations, extendable to 3D arrays
- Could be key to neural prosthesis systems focusing on the central nervous system

Electrochemical Etch Stop

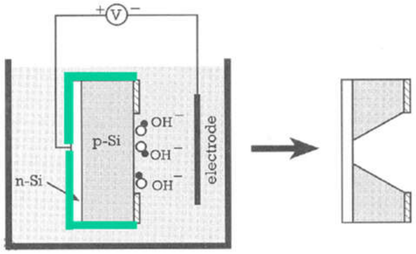
Electrochemical Etch Stop

- When silicon is biased with a sufficiently large anodic potential relative to the etchant → get oxidation (i.e., electrochemical passivation), which then prevents etching
- For passivation to occur, current flow is required
- If current flow can be prevented → no oxide growth, and etching can proceed
  - Can prevent current flow by adding a reverse-biased diode structure



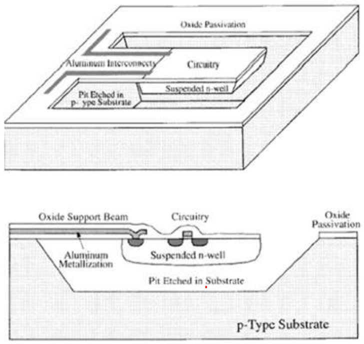
Electrochemical Etch Stop

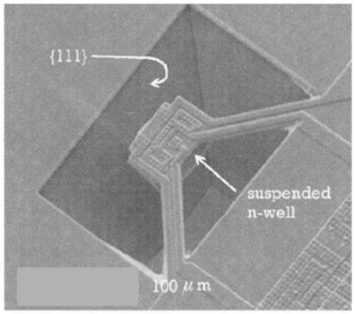
- Electrochemical etch stop
  - n-type epitaxial layer grown on p-type wafer forms p-n junction diode
  - $V_p > V_n$ → electrical conduction (current flow)
  - $V_p < V_n$ → reverse bias current (very little current flow)
- Passivation potential: potential at which thin SiO_2 film forms
  - different for p-Si and n-Si, but basically need the Si to be the anode in an electrolytic setup
- Setup:
  - p-n diode in reverse bias
  - p-substrate floating → etched
  - n-layer above passivation potential → not etched



Electrochemical Etching of CMOS

- N-type Si well with circuits suspended f/ SiO_2 support beam
- Thermally and electrically isolated
- If use TMAH etchant, doped (w/Si) Al bond pads safe





[Reay, et al. (1994)]
[Kovacs Group, Stanford]

Ex: Bulk Micromachined Pressure Sensors

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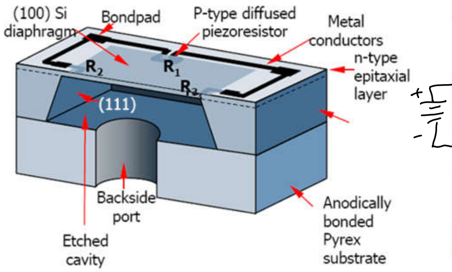
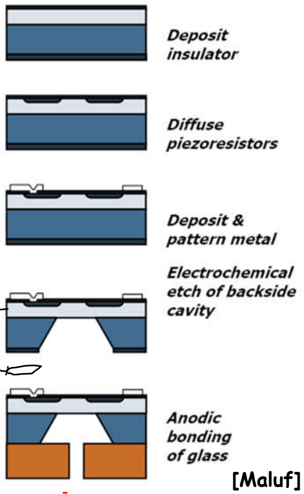
- Piezoresistivity: change in electrical resistance due to mechanical stress
- In response to pressure load on thin Si film, piezoresistive elements change resistance
- Membrane deflection < 1 μm



n-type epilayer, p-type substrate



[Maluf]

Ex: Pressure Sensors

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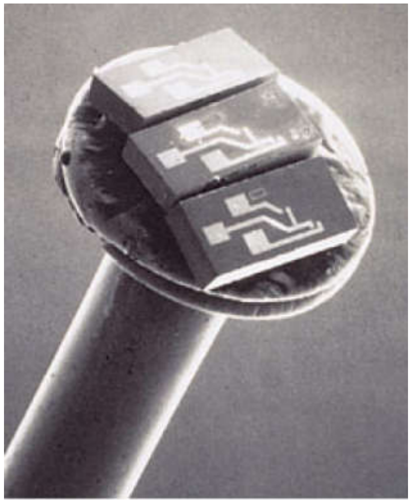
- Below: catheter tip pressure sensor [Lucas NovaSensor]
  - Only 150×400×900 μm³



Deep Reactive-Ion Etching (DRIE)

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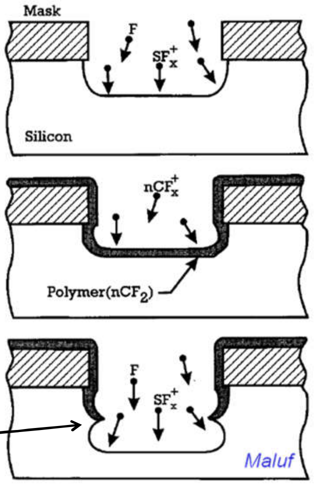
The Bosch process:

- Inductively-coupled plasma
- Etch Rate: 1.5-4 μm/min
- Two main cycles in the etch:
  - Etch cycle (5-15 s): SF_6 (SF_x^+) etches Si
  - Deposition cycle: (5-15 s): C_4F_8 deposits fluorocarbon protective polymer $(CF_2\text{-})_n$
- Etch mask selectivity:
  - SiO_2 ~ 200:1
  - Photoresist ~ 100:1
- Issue: finite sidewall roughness
  - scalloping < 50 nm
- Sidewall angle: 90° ± 2°



DRIE Issues: Etch Rate Variance

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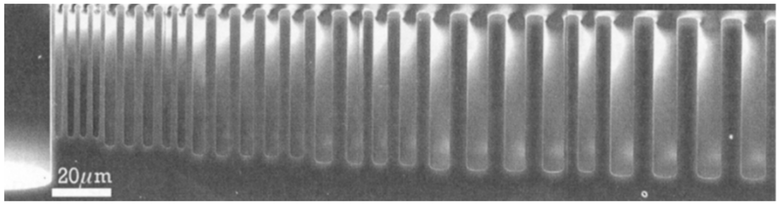
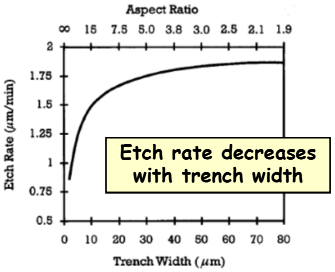
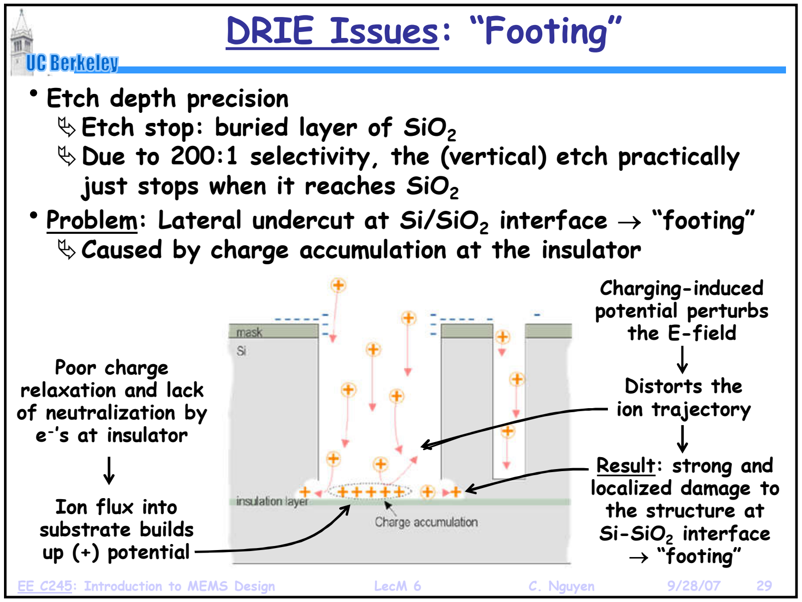


- Etch rate is diffusion-limited and drops for narrow trenches
  - Adjust mask layout to eliminate large disparities
  - Adjust process parameters (slow down the etch rate to that governed by the slowest feature)



Etch rate decreases with trench width



DRIE Issues: "Footing"

- Etch depth precision
  - Etch stop: buried layer of SiO_2
  - Due to 200:1 selectivity, the (vertical) etch practically just stops when it reaches SiO_2
- Problem: Lateral undercut at Si/SiO_2 interface → "footing"
  - Caused by charge accumulation at the insulator

Poor charge relaxation and lack of neutralization by e⁻'s at insulator
↓
Ion flux into substrate builds up (+) potential

Charging-induced potential perturbs the E-field
↓
Distorts the ion trajectory
↓
Result: strong and localized damage to the structure at Si-SiO_2 interface → "footing"

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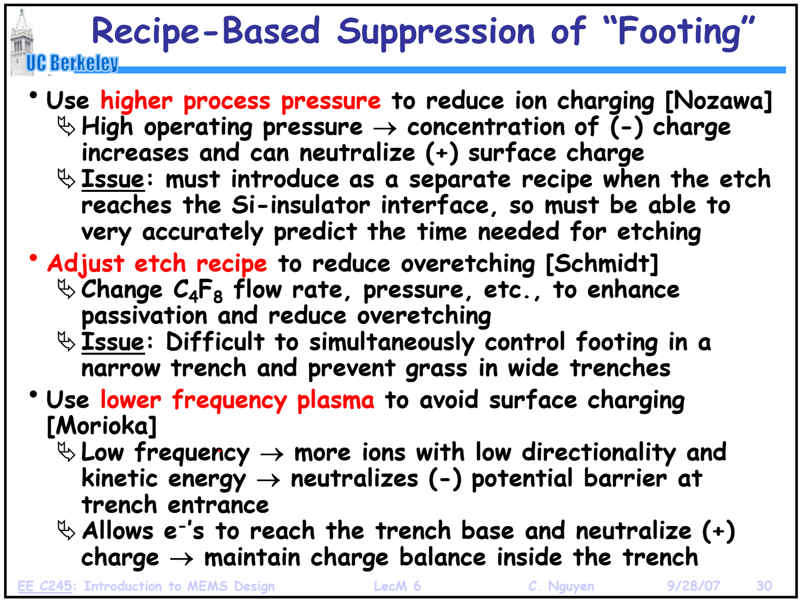

Recipe-Based Suppression of "Footing"

- Use higher process pressure to reduce ion charging [Nozawa]
  - High operating pressure → concentration of (-) charge increases and can neutralize (+) surface charge
  - Issue: must introduce as a separate recipe when the etch reaches the Si-insulator interface, so must be able to very accurately predict the time needed for etching
- Adjust etch recipe to reduce overetching [Schmidt]
  - Change C_4F_8 flow rate, pressure, etc., to enhance passivation and reduce overetching
  - Issue: Difficult to simultaneously control footing in a narrow trench and prevent grass in wide trenches
- Use lower frequency plasma to avoid surface charging [Morioka]
  - Low frequency → more ions with low directionality and kinetic energy → neutralizes (-) potential barrier at trench entrance
  - Allows e⁻'s to reach the trench base and neutralize (+) charge → maintain charge balance inside the trench

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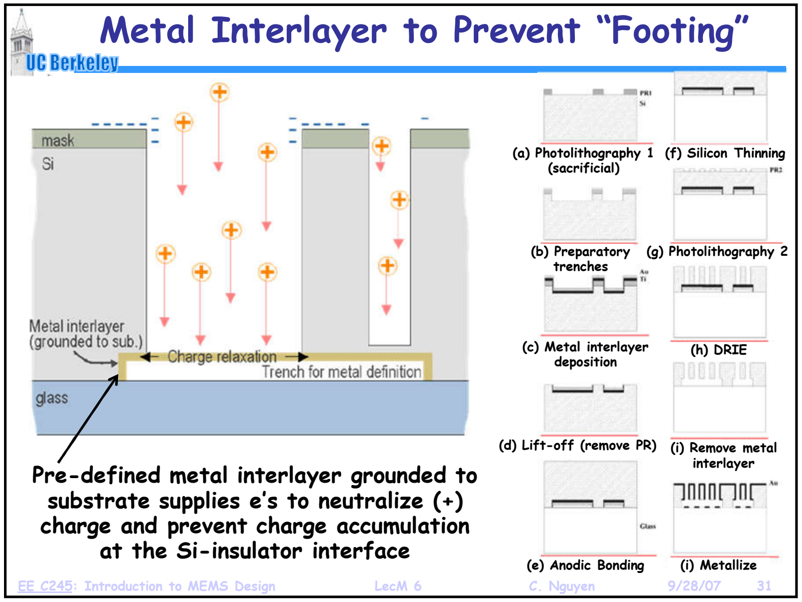

Metal Interlayer to Prevent "Footing"

Pre-defined metal interlayer grounded to substrate supplies e's to neutralize (+) charge and prevent charge accumulation at the Si-insulator interface

(a) Photolithography 1 (sacrificial)
(b) Preparatory trenches
(c) Metal interlayer deposition
(d) Lift-off (remove PR)
(e) Anodic Bonding
(f) Silicon Thinning
(g) Photolithography 2
(h) DRIE
(i) Remove metal interlayer
(i) Metallize

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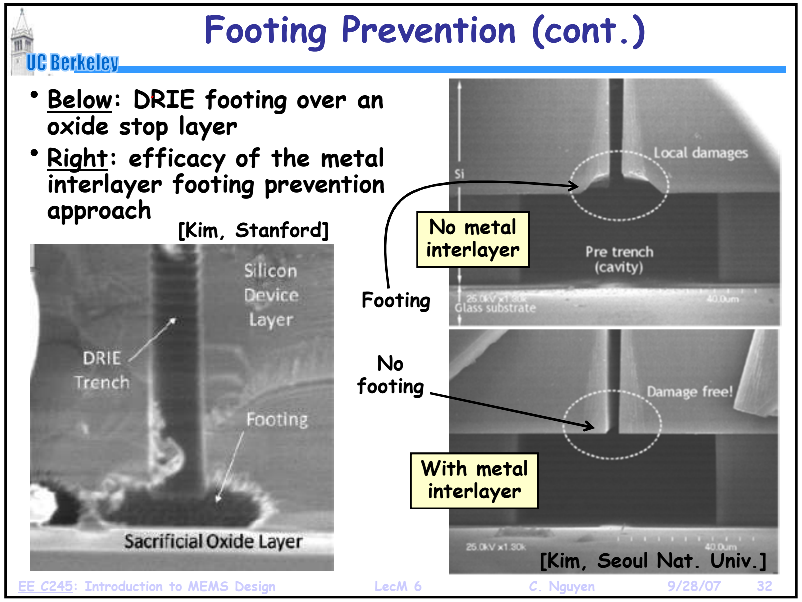

Footing Prevention (cont.)

- Below: DRIE footing over an oxide stop layer
- Right: efficacy of the metal interlayer footing prevention approach

[Kim, Stanford]

[Kim, Seoul Nat. Univ.]

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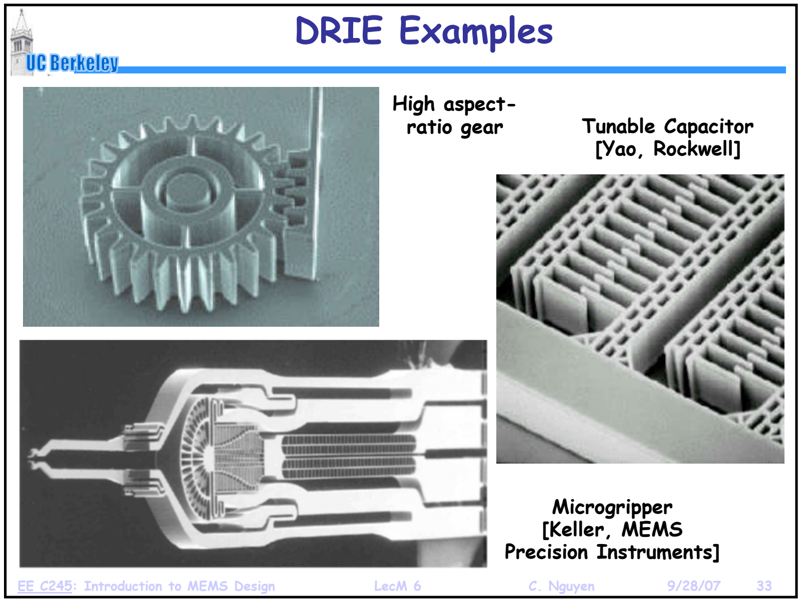
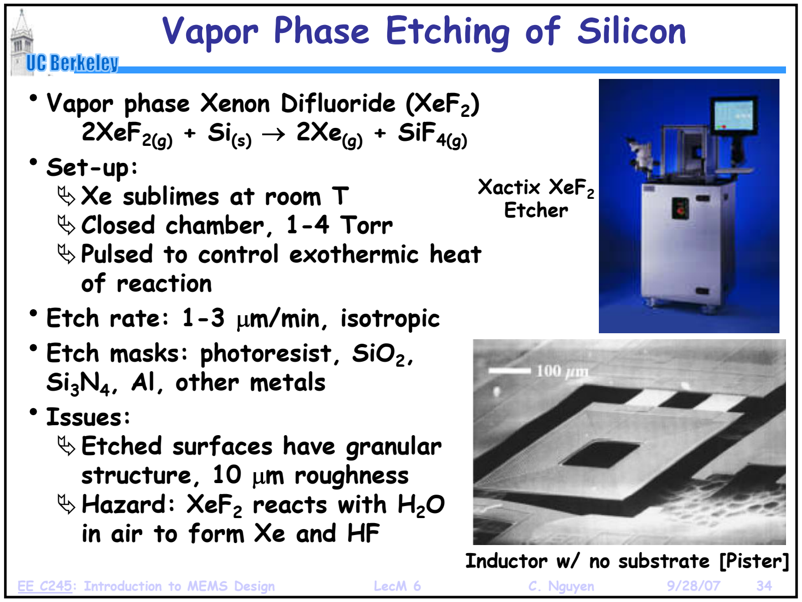


DRIE Examples

High aspect-ratio gear

Tunable Capacitor
[Yao, Rockwell]

Microgripper
[Keller, MEMS Precision Instruments]

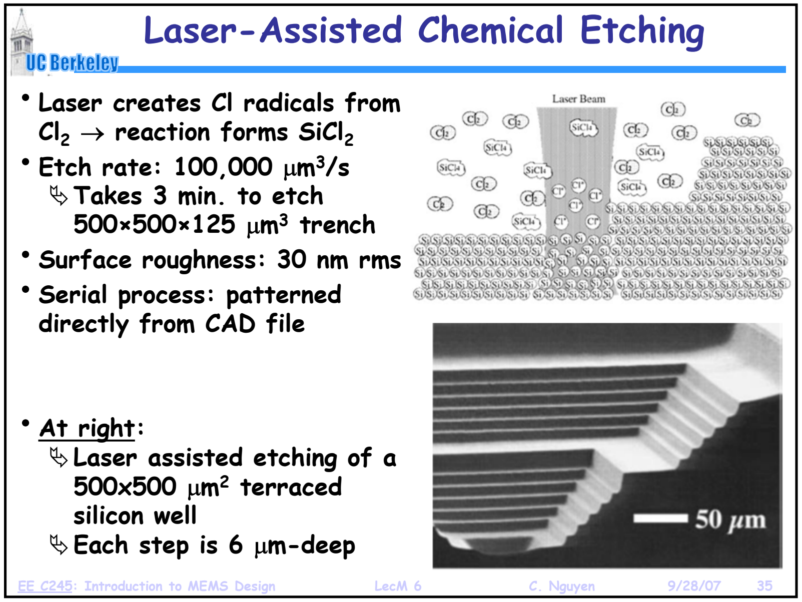


Vapor Phase Etching of Silicon

- Vapor phase Xenon Difluoride (XeF_2)
  $2XeF_{2(g)} + Si_{(s)} \rightarrow 2Xe_{(g)} + SiF_{4(g)}$
- Set-up:
  - Xe sublimes at room T
  - Closed chamber, 1-4 Torr
  - Pulsed to control exothermic heat of reaction
- Etch rate: 1-3 μm/min, isotropic
- Etch masks: photoresist, SiO_2, Si_3N_4, Al, other metals
- Issues:
  - Etched surfaces have granular structure, 10 μm roughness
  - Hazard: XeF_2 reacts with H_2O in air to form Xe and HF

Xactix XeF_2 Etcher

Inductor w/ no substrate [Pister]



Laser-Assisted Chemical Etching

- Laser creates Cl radicals from $Cl_2 \rightarrow$ reaction forms $SiCl_2$
- Etch rate: 100,000 $\mu m^3/s$
  - Takes 3 min. to etch 500×500×125 μm^3 trench
- Surface roughness: 30 nm rms
- Serial process: patterned directly from CAD file

- At right:
  - Laser assisted etching of a 500x500 μm^2 terraced silicon well
  - Each step is 6 μm-deep