



AN 386

Improved Characterization of Diffusion in Ohmic Contacts on an AlGaAs Laser Diode using Backside SIMS

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Discussion

The performance of semiconductor devices can be affected by the diffusion of metals from the ohmic contacts. Secondary Ion Mass Spectrometry (SIMS) is a proven analytical tool for materials characterization. However, standard SIMS profiling sometimes cannot distinguish diffusion contamination from SIMS artifacts due to limits in depth resolution.

Backside SIMS was used successfully to study the diffusion of a Au/Pt/Ti metal stack on an AlGaAs laser diode as well as to identify unintentional p-type doping. The data illustrates the excellent polishing depth calibration, minimal surface roughness and excellent planar control.

The SIMS sputtering mechanism may introduce roughening of the crater bottom, especially in poly-crystalline materials where material is removed preferentially along the crystal orientation. This results in a significant degradation of the depth resolution and renders the data useless to evaluate the diffusion of ohmic contact materials into the underlying semiconductor. Backside SIMS avoids these problems by polishing away the substrate down to the depth of interest and then profiling from the backside through the semiconductor or substrate into the metal film.

The laser diode was mounted upside down on a substrate with epoxy glue. It was polished on an Allied High Tech Products, Inc. MultiPrep tool with Dia-Grid Diamond Discs. The polishing was completed over several stages while changing the Diamond Disc from coarse to fine until about one micron of material remained before the area of interest. The surface was polished parallel to the initial surface to within 0.01°. A larger angle would adversely impact the depth resolution.

The first example is a laser diode with ohmic contact on the wave-guide. Figure 1 shows a depth profile of the metal contact layers that was acquired by sputtering from the front of the sample. The Ti profile shows a double peak which is due to matrix effects and a slowly decaying signal due to sputter roughening. The curve extends well into the semiconductor layer and settles at a level which is significantly higher than the instrument background. The Au profile also suggests a high level of Au in the semiconductor structure.

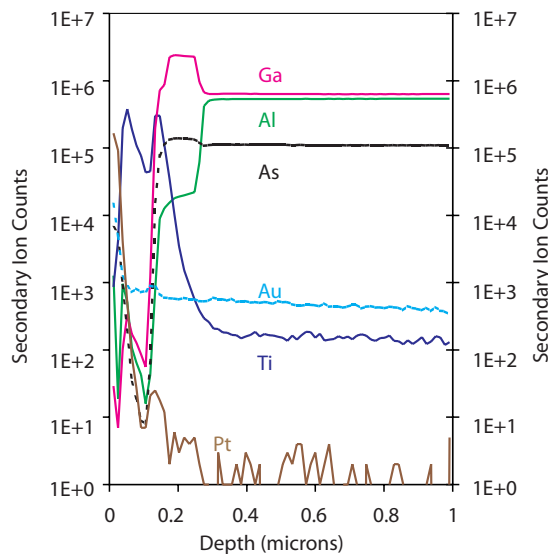


Figure 1. SIMS depth profile of the metal contact layers that was acquired by sputtering from the front of the sample

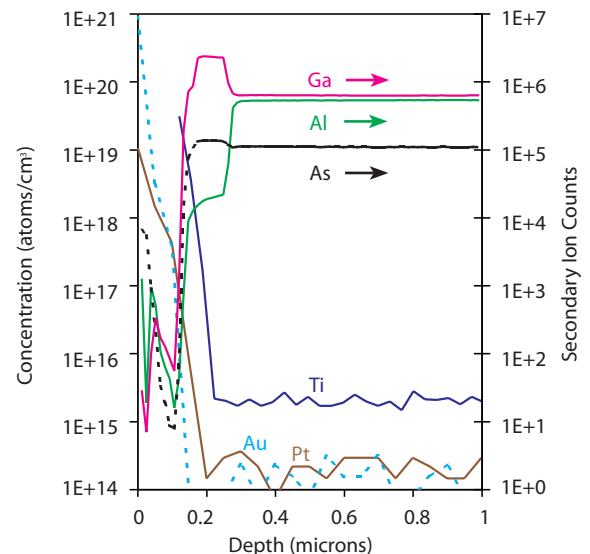


Figure 2. Backside SIMS depth profile of the metal contact layer

The results of the Backside SIMS analysis are shown in Figure 2 with the depth scale reversed to allow for easy comparison to the initial data. The Au, Pt and Ti profiles indicate a sharp drop from the maximum concentrations in the contact layers to the much lower background levels in the semiconductor.

A second problem was investigated of unintentional doping in the laser diode. Profiling for Zn, a p-type dopant, through the contact layers was attempted without success. The interference from memory effects of the metal layers is too high to detect low concentrations of Zn. The Backside SIMS Zn depth profiles with detection limits of $2E+15$ at/cm³ from two laser diodes are plotted in figures 3 and 4. The unintentional doping of Zn at a concentration of about $1E+18$ at/cm³ near the active region is clearly detected in the "Bad" device.

The data acquired by Backside SIMS confirmed that there was no measurable diffusion of the metal contacts into the semiconductor. In addition, this technique allowed for the detection of unintentional doping by Zn in the "Bad" Laser diode.

Backside SIMS offers a powerful extension of the mature SIMS technique to study materials issues which were previously not possible or were deferred to less sensitive techniques for the lack of a practical SIMS solution.

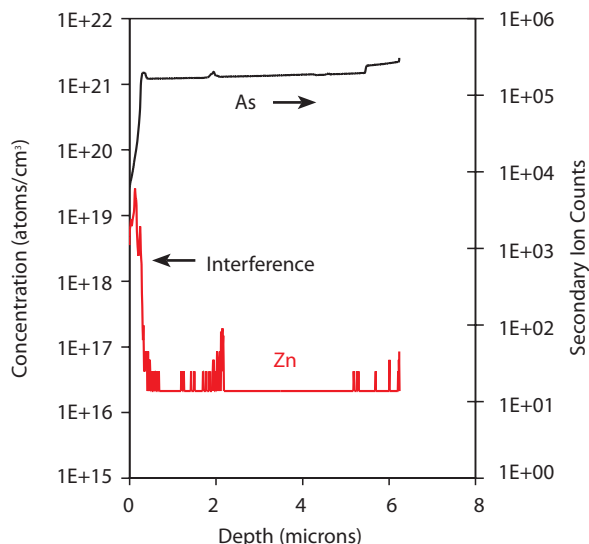


Figure 3. Backside SIMS depth profile of Zn in "Good" device

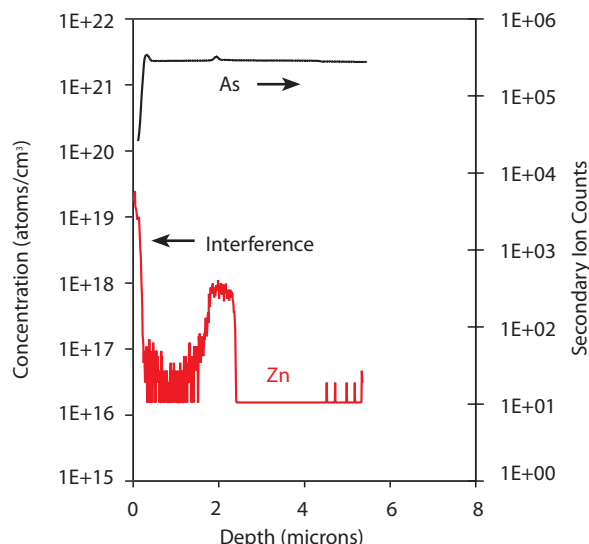


Figure 4. Backside SIMS depth profile of Zn in "Bad" device

United States Locations

Tempe, Arizona
+1 480 239 0602 info.az@eaglabs.com
+1 602 470 2655 fax

Sunnyvale, California
810 Kifer Road
+1 408 530 3500 info.ca@eaglabs.com
+1 408 530 3501 fax

1135 E Arques Avenue
+1 408 738 3033
+1 408 738 3035 fax

785 Lucerne Drive
+1 408 737 3892
+1 408 737 3916 fax

Peabody, Massachusetts
+1 978 278 9500 info.ma@eaglabs.com
+1 978 278 9501 fax

Chanhassen, Minnesota
+1 952 828 6411 info.mn@eaglabs.com
+1 952 828 6449 fax

East Windsor, New Jersey
+1 609 371 4800 info.nj@eaglabs.com
+1 609 371 5666 fax

Syracuse, New York
+1 315 431 9900 info.ny@eaglabs.com
+1 315 431 9800 fax

Raleigh, North Carolina
+1 919 829 7041 info.nc@eaglabs.com
+1 919 829 5518 fax

Round Rock, Texas
+1 512 671 9500 info.tx@eaglabs.com
+1 512 671 9501 fax

International Locations

Shanghai, China
+ 86 21 6879 6088 info.cn@eaglabs.com
+ 86 21 6879 9086 fax

Tournefeuille, France
+ 33 5 61 73 15 29 info.fr@eaglabs.com
+ 33 5 61 73 15 67 fax

Frankfurt, Germany
+ 49 (0) 693053213 info.de@eaglabs.com
+ 49 (0) 69307941 fax

Tokyo, Japan
+ 81 3 5396 0531 info.jp@eaglabs.com
+ 81 3 5396 1930 fax

HsinChu, Taiwan
+ 886 3 5632303 info.tw@eaglabs.com
+ 886 3 5632306 fax

Uxbridge, United Kingdom
+ 44 (0) 1895 811194 info.uk@eaglabs.com
+ 44 (0) 1895 810350 fax