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Reduction of mosaic spread using iridium interlayers: A route to improved oxide heteroepitaxy on silicon

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Using epitaxial SrTiO$_3$ and yttria-stabilized zirconia (YSZ) buffer layers deposited on silicon as a starting point, epitaxial iridium layers were grown by electron-beam evaporation using a two-step growth process with an extremely low initial deposition rate. The iridium layers had in-plane (twist) and out-of-plane (tilt) full widths at half maximum as narrow as 0.08° and 0.15°, respectively, up to an order of magnitude narrower than the underlying SrTiO$_3$ and YSZ layers. SrTiO$_3$ and ZnO films grown on the iridium showed significantly narrower twist and tilt values than without the iridium interlayer, demonstrating a route to improved oxide heteroepitaxy on silicon. © 2007 American Institute of Physics. [DOI: 10.1063/1.2768003]

Silicon is an attractive substrate for the heteroepitaxial growth of a variety of functional oxides. To avoid reaction between the functional oxide and the underlying silicon, an epitaxial oxide buffer layer that is stable in contact with silicon is typically introduced, forming a functional oxide/oxide buffer/silicon heterostructure. Such epitaxial buffer layers include MgO, SrO, BaO, Y$_2$O$_3$, CeO$_2$, ZrO$_2$, Y$_2$O$_3$–ZrO$_2$, and Al$_2$O$_3$. Via these buffer layers, a multitude of functional oxides, including high-temperature superconductors and ferroelectrics, have been epitaxially integrated with silicon.

Unfortunately, the in-plane and out-of-plane epitaxial alignments (mosaic spreads) of epitaxial oxides on silicon as deduced from x-ray diffraction (XRD) rocking curves and azimuthal scans are still significantly higher than that of state-of-the-art semiconductor heterostructures. Further reduction of the mosaic spread and simpler processes for the heteroepitaxial integration of high quality functional oxides with silicon are therefore desired.

In the present work we show that the epitaxial iridium films with very low mosaic spread can be grown on epitaxial oxide buffer layers on silicon. When epitaxial oxides are in turn grown on these iridium interlayers, the result is an oxide layer with a significantly reduced mosaic spread. This provides a new route for the realization of higher quality epitaxial oxide layers on silicon.

Two different techniques, molecular-beam epitaxy (MBE) and pulsed-laser deposition (PLD), were applied for the preparation of the oxide layers in this work. The heteroepitaxial SrTiO$_3$ buffer layers on silicon were grown by MBE. The growth process involves the formation of a strontium silicide layer on a cleaned and 2×1 reconstructed Si(001) surface, the consecutive deposition of SrO and TiO$_2$ which are transformed into SrTiO$_3$ in a topotactic reaction, and finally the epitaxial SrTiO$_3$ growth by depositing alternating monolayers of TiO$_2$ and SrO. Details on the process parameters are given in Ref. 13.

YSZ films on silicon and the SrTiO$_3$ layers on iridium were prepared by PLD with a KrF excimer laser (pulse duration: 25 ns, pulse energy: 700–850 mJ) using cylindrical targets. The stoichiometry of the cubic YSZ target was (YO$_{1.3}$)$_{0.21}$(ZrO$_2$)$_{0.79}$. Ablation was done at substrate temperatures between 750 and 850 °C in an oxygen background pressure of 5×10$^{-4}$ mbar for YSZ and 7×10$^{-5}$ mbar for SrTiO$_3$. During YSZ growth the first 300 pulses were performed in high vacuum to remove the amorphous silicon oxide. The iridium layers were deposited by electron-beam evaporation at a substrate temperature of 650 °C in high vacuum (10$^{-6}$ mbar).

Figure 1 shows θ-2θ XRD scans of two 150-nm-thick iridium films deposited on a MBE-grown SrTiO$_3$/Si(001) substrate. In Fig. 1(a) the iridium was grown with a deposition rate of 0.05 nm/s. Although this rate yielded (001)-oriented epitaxial iridium films with low mosaic spread on SrTiO$_3$ single crystals, the XRD pattern of the present Ir/SrTiO$_3$/Si stack is dominated by a strong 111 Ir peak with only a minor fraction (~1%) of (001)-oriented epitaxial iridium. For the iridium layer in Fig. 1(b) a nucleation step with a strongly reduced deposition rate of 0.002 nm/s was applied for the first 20 nm. The XRD pattern contains only the 002 peak of epitaxial iridium with negligible (<0.1%) signal from other iridium-related Bragg reflections.

![FIG. 1. θ-2θ scans of two 150-nm-thick iridium films deposited on an MBE-grown SrTiO$_3$ buffer layer on Si(001). Iridium deposition rate: (a) 0.05 nm/s and (b) 0.002 nm/s for the first 20 nm. Intensity ratio I(Ir 200)/I(Ir 111): (a) 0.03 and (b) 2100.](image-url)
Table I, show that a reduction in mosaic spread by an order of magnitude in the iridium layers on Ir/YSZ/Si(001) structures were studied by transmission electron microscopy (TEM). Figure 3 shows a cross-sectional TEM image of an Ir/YSZ/Si(001) sample taken along the [110] zone axis.

Iridium layers with low mosaic spread have been grown on 4 in. diam YSZ/Si wafers. Their suitability for the heteroepitaxial growth of single crystal diamond layers has recently been realized. Moreover, several properties of iridium led us to believe that the low in-plane and out-of-plane mosaic spreads of an epitaxial iridium interlayer might dramatically improve the mosaic spread of epitaxial oxide films grown on top of it. As compared to other elements of the platinum group, iridium has a high affinity to oxygen. This affinity in connection with its high melting point provides a strongly modulated surface potential necessary for the epitaxial alignment of the overlying film. The ability to limit the oxidation of iridium to its surface preserves its narrow mosaic spread and enables it to template an overlying epitaxial oxide. These rather unique properties of iridium motivated us to assess the ability of an iridium interlayer with excellent in-plane and out-of-plane epitaxial alignments to improve the mosaic spread of epitaxial oxide films grown on it. As we show below, it does indeed work for this purpose.

SrTiO$_3$ was grown on an Ir/SrTiO$_3$/Si(001) sample, where part of the MBE-grown SrTiO$_3$ buffer layer was not covered by the iridium interlayer to allow for a direct comparison with homoepitaxial growth (samples 6 and 7 in Table I). Figure 4(a) contrasts the mosaic spread of the starting lower than in the YSZ layer (\(10^{12}\) cm$^{-2}$). Thus, starting directly from the interface the crystalline quality of the iridium film is significantly higher than in the underlying oxide.

**Table I.** Mosaic spread (FWHM values) for the different epitaxial heterostructures discussed. The angular resolution of the used XRD setup (Ref. 17) was better than 0.05°. The twist values were deduced from azimuthal scans under consideration of the broadening contribution due to the tilt (Ref. 21). In systems 1–8 all layers besides SrTiO$_3$ on Si(001) (rotated by 45°; see Ref. 13) and YSZ on Si(111) (rotation by 60°) grow in a cube-on-cube registry. Sample 9: ZnO(0001)[100]/Ir[111][110]/YSZ[111][110]; sample 10: ZnO(0001)[100]/YSZ[111][110]/SrTiO$_3$(111)[10$\bar{1}$].
MBE-grown SrTiO\(_3\) buffer layer with the SrTiO\(_3\) overlayer that was simultaneously deposited on the bare SrTiO\(_3\)/Si as well as on Ir/SrTiO\(_3\)/Si. The FWHMs of the SrTiO\(_3\) layer on top of the iridium interlayer are significantly narrower than both the starting SrTiO\(_3\) buffer layer as well as the overgrown SrTiO\(_3\) layer that did not have the iridium interlayer beneath it. Thus, not only can oxides grow epitaxially on iridium but also the insertion of an iridium interlayer can significantly improve the mosaic spread of the overgrown epitaxial oxide layer. We also prepared SrTiO\(_3\)/Ir/YSZ/Si(001) multilayers (sample 8 in Table I), which combine the reduction in mosaic spread of the iridium interlayer with the ease of preparation of the YSZ buffer layers on silicon. The resulting SrTiO\(_3\) overlayer had tilt and twist FWHMs of 0.4°.

As an additional example, we studied the epitaxial overgrowth of ZnO films on YSZ/Si(111) buffer layers with and without the iridium interlayer. The results (samples 9 and 10 in Table I) were quite similar: the tilt and twist of the ZnO layer on top of the iridium interlayer are significantly narrower than both the starting YSZ buffer layer as well as the overgrown ZnO layer that did not have the iridium interlayer beneath it. Using this iridium interlayer approach oriented ZnO nanopillars have also been grown.

In summary, we have shown that epitaxial iridium layers with extremely narrow mosaic spread (FWHM < 0.1°) can be deposited on epitaxial oxide buffer layers with relatively broad mosaic spread on silicon. The strongest effect was observed for iridium on YSZ, a material pair with a lattice misfit of 25%. In most material systems misorientation of a buffer layer strongly deteriorates the crystalline quality in the subsequent layer on top. Iridium exhibits the unusual ability to form a single crystal in spite of a high density of defects in the underlying buffer layer and a huge lattice misfit. The specific material properties of iridium and its growth mode can help to explain this effect. Iridium and other metals start in an island growth mode at the high temperatures and low deposition rates, which are required to achieve epitaxial orientation. The transition from islands to an agglomerated film can be described by the liquidlike-coalescence mechanism. This process involves surface diffusion and rearrangement of the islands. It is most effective for layer materials with low anisotropy, high coordination, close packing, and orientation-independent bonding. Metals are model systems with these properties. A detailed texture analysis of the first stages of iridium growth on YSZ buffer layers on silicon shows that the coalescence of the metal islands is accompanied by a realignment of the impinging islands towards an intermediate orientation, which elucidates the pronounced texture improvement. These highly oriented iridium films can serve as epitaxial templates for oxide overgrowth, leading to dramatic improvements in the crystalline quality of functional oxides on silicon.

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