US011733533B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Godet et al.

(10) **Patent No.: US 11,733,533 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent: *Aug. 22, 2023**

(54) **FABRICATION OF DIFFRACTION GRATINGS**

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(73) Assignee: **Applied Materials, Inc.**, Santa Clara, CA (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

(21) Appl. No.: **17/745,457**

(22) Filed: **May 16, 2022**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2022/0276498 A1 Sep. 1, 2022

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 16/454,642, filed on Jun. 27, 2019, now Pat. No. 11,333,896.
(Continued)

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G02B 27/09 (2006.01)
G02B 5/18 (2006.01)
(Continued)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***G02B 27/0944*** (2013.01); ***G02B 5/18*** (2013.01); ***G02B 5/1857*** (2013.01); ***G03F 1/80*** (2013.01); ***G03F 7/0002*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC G02B 27/0944; G02B 5/18; G02B 5/1857; G02B 6/124; G02B 6/136; G03F 1/80;
(Continued)

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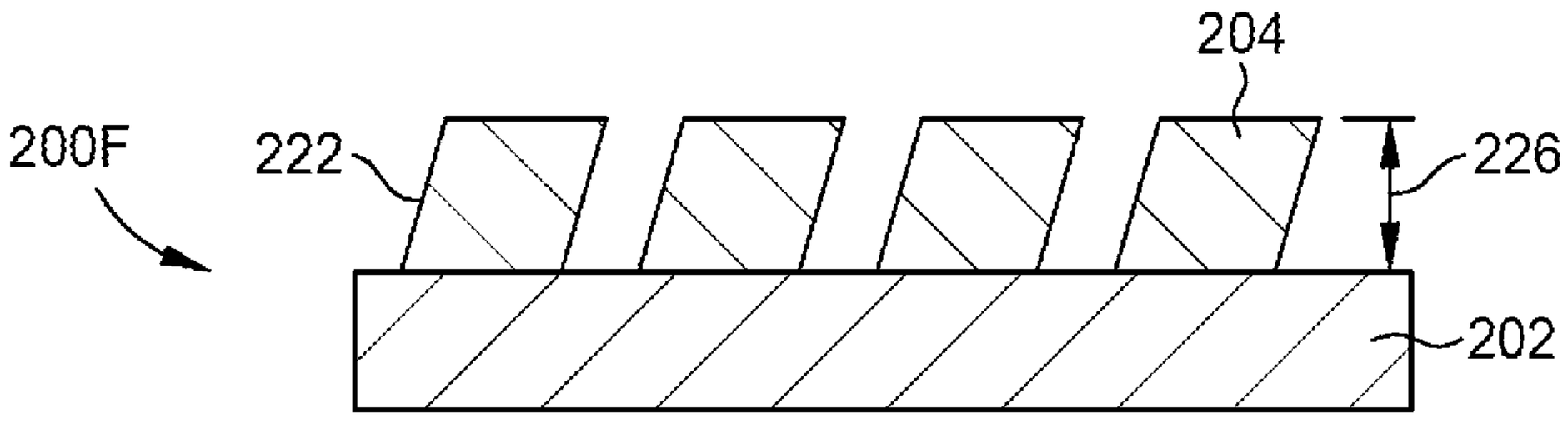
PCT Notification of Transmittal of the International Search Report and the Written Opinion of the International Searching Authority for International Application No. PCT/US2019/039615; dated Oct. 18, 2019; 11 total pages.
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Primary Examiner — Duy Vu N Deo
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Patterson + Sheridan, LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

The systems and methods discussed herein are for the fabrication of diffraction gratings, such as those gratings used in waveguide combiners. The waveguide combiners discussed herein are fabricated using nanoimprint lithography (NIL) of high-index and low-index materials in combination with and directional etching high-index and low-index materials. The waveguide combiners can be additionally or alternatively formed by the directional etching of transparent substrates. The waveguide combiners that include diffraction gratings discussed herein can be formed directly on permanent transparent substrates. In other examples, the diffraction gratings can be formed on temporary substrates and transferred to a permanent, transparent substrate.

20 Claims, 12 Drawing Sheets



Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 62/692,286, filed on Jun. 29, 2018, provisional application No. 62/691,421, filed on Jun. 28, 2018.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G03F 1/80 (2012.01)
G03F 7/00 (2006.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
CPC G03F 7/0002; G03F 7/2022; H01L 21/02266; H01L 21/0228; H01L 21/0337; H01L 21/306
USPC 216/24
See application file for complete search history.

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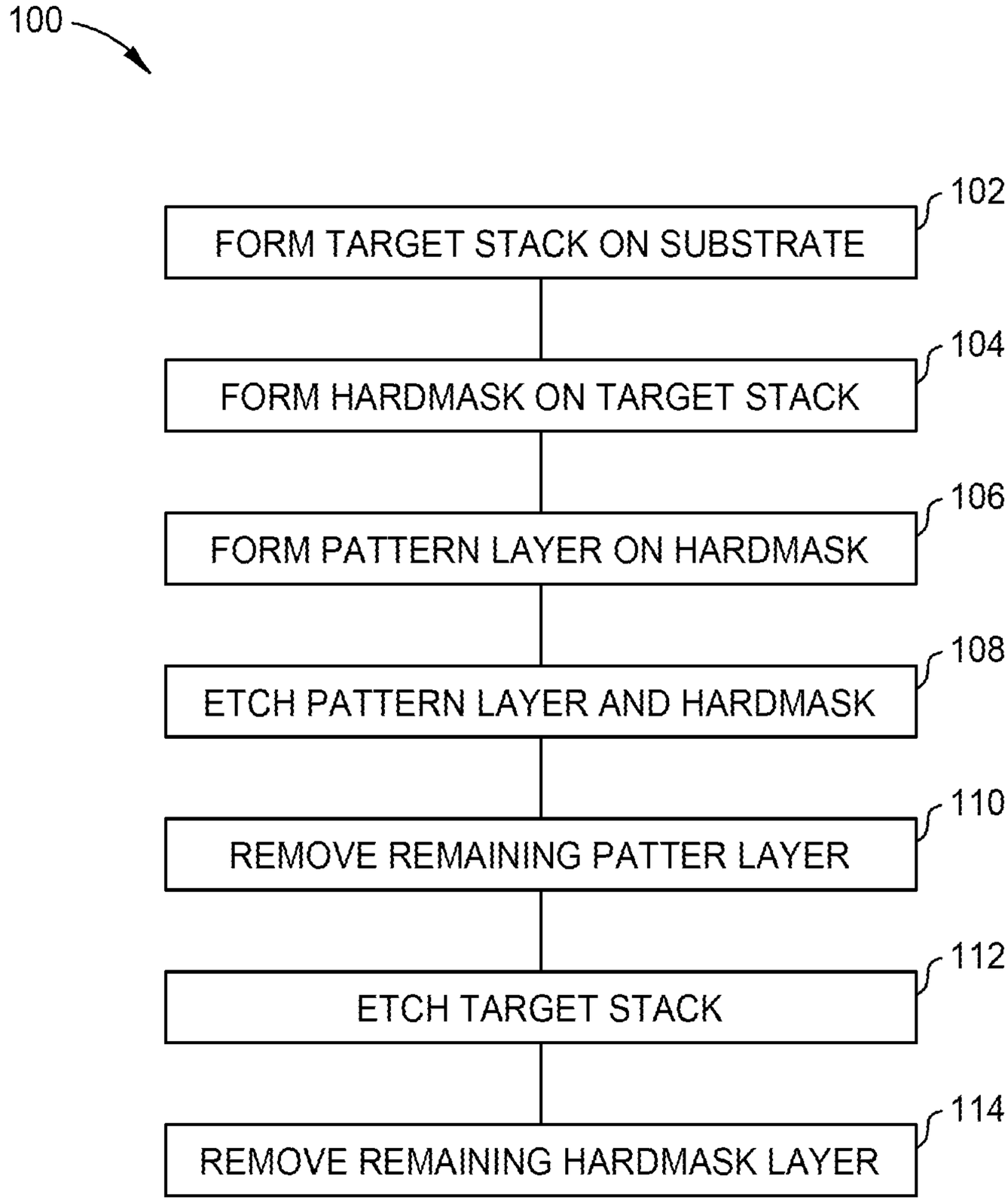

100
FORM TARGET STACK ON SUBSTRATE
102
FORM HARDMASK ON TARGET STACK
104
FORM PATTERN LAYER ON HARDMASK
106
ETCH PATTERN LAYER AND HARDMASK
108
REMOVE REMAINING PATTER LAYER
110
ETCH TARGET STACK
112
REMOVE REMAINING HARDMASK LAYER
114

FIG. 1

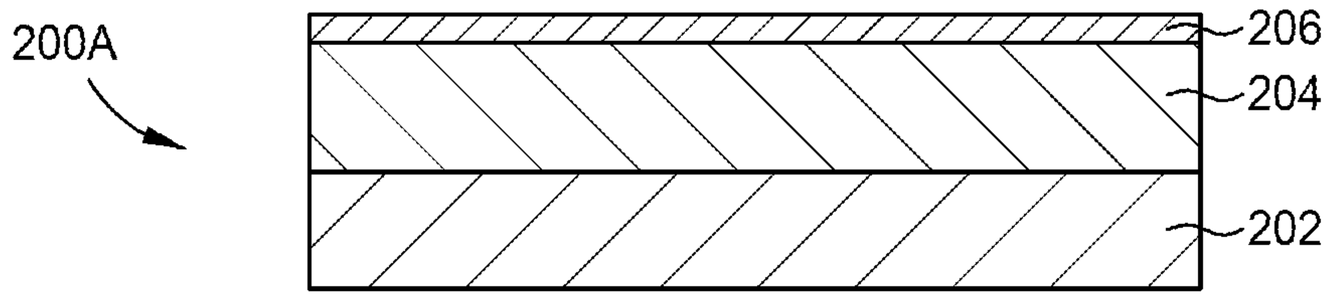


FIG. 2A

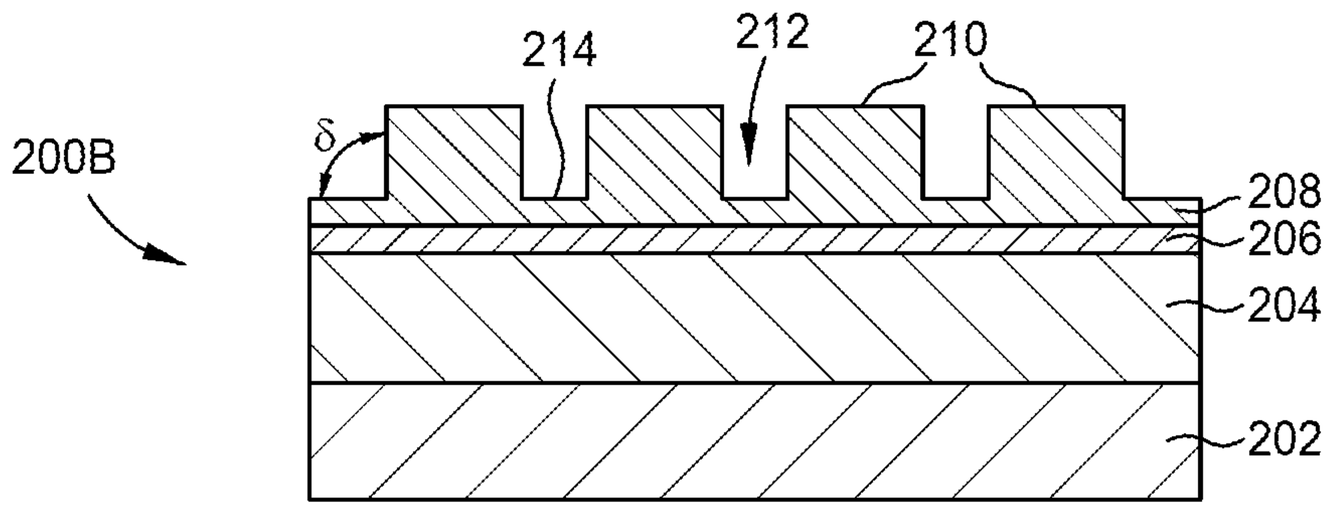


FIG. 2B

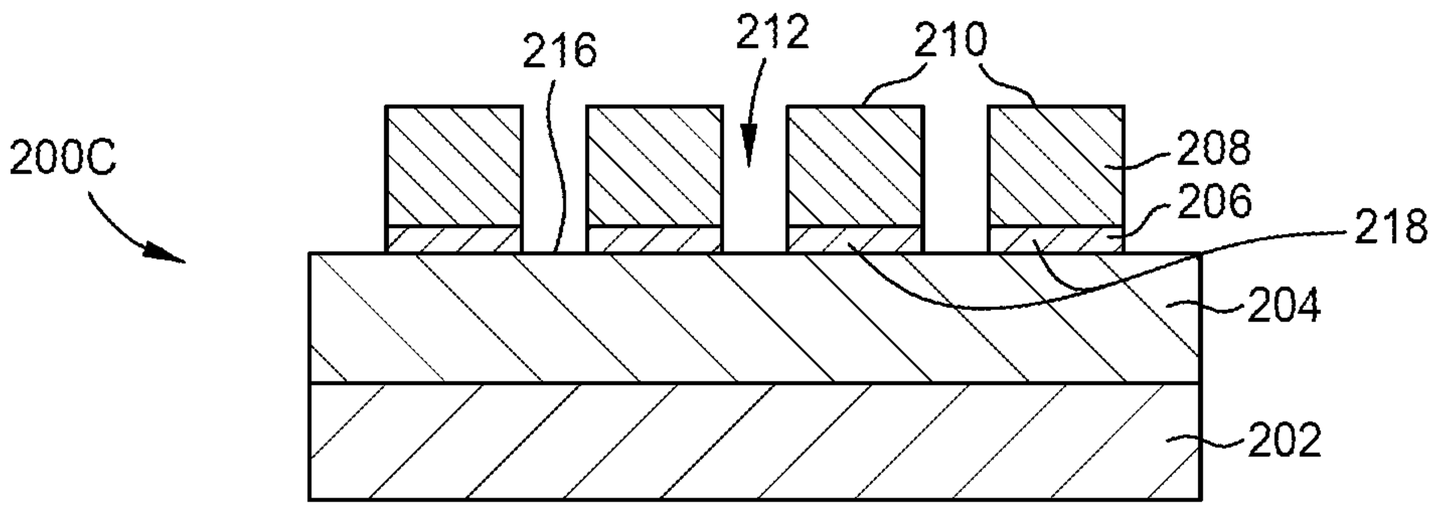


FIG. 2C

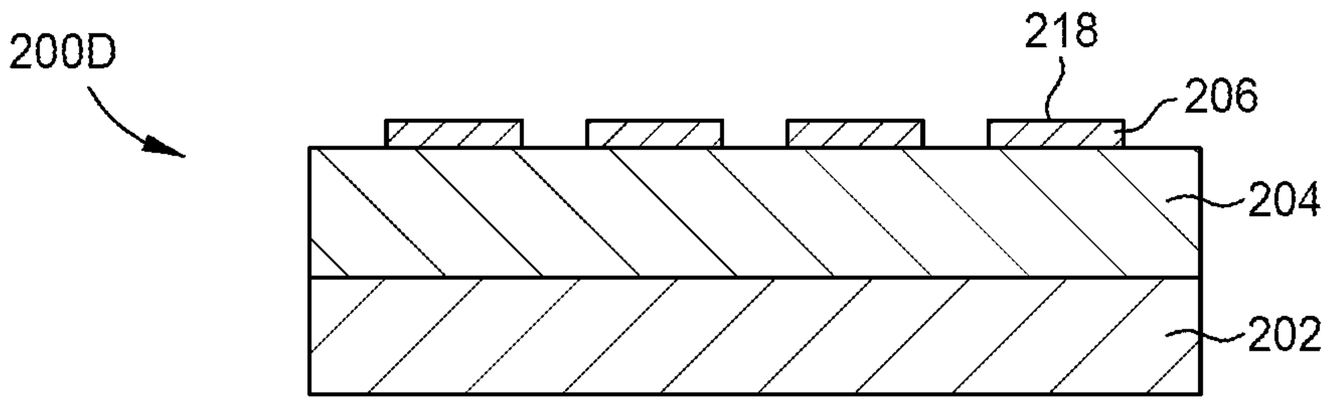


FIG. 2D

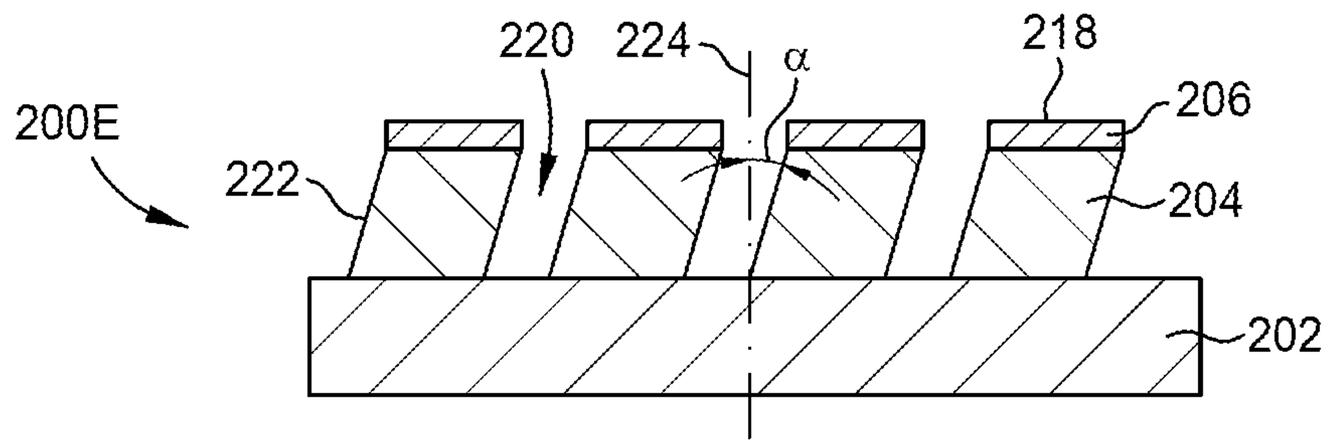


FIG. 2E

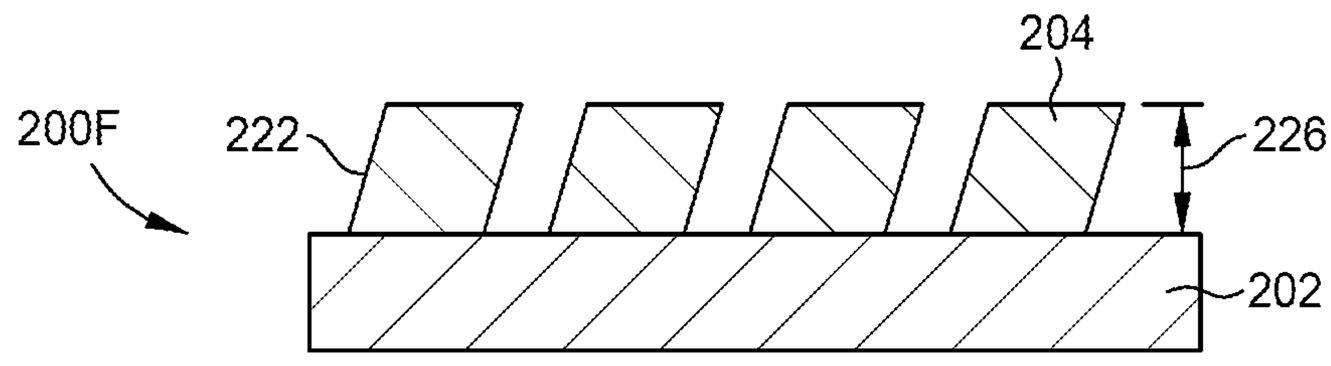


FIG. 2F

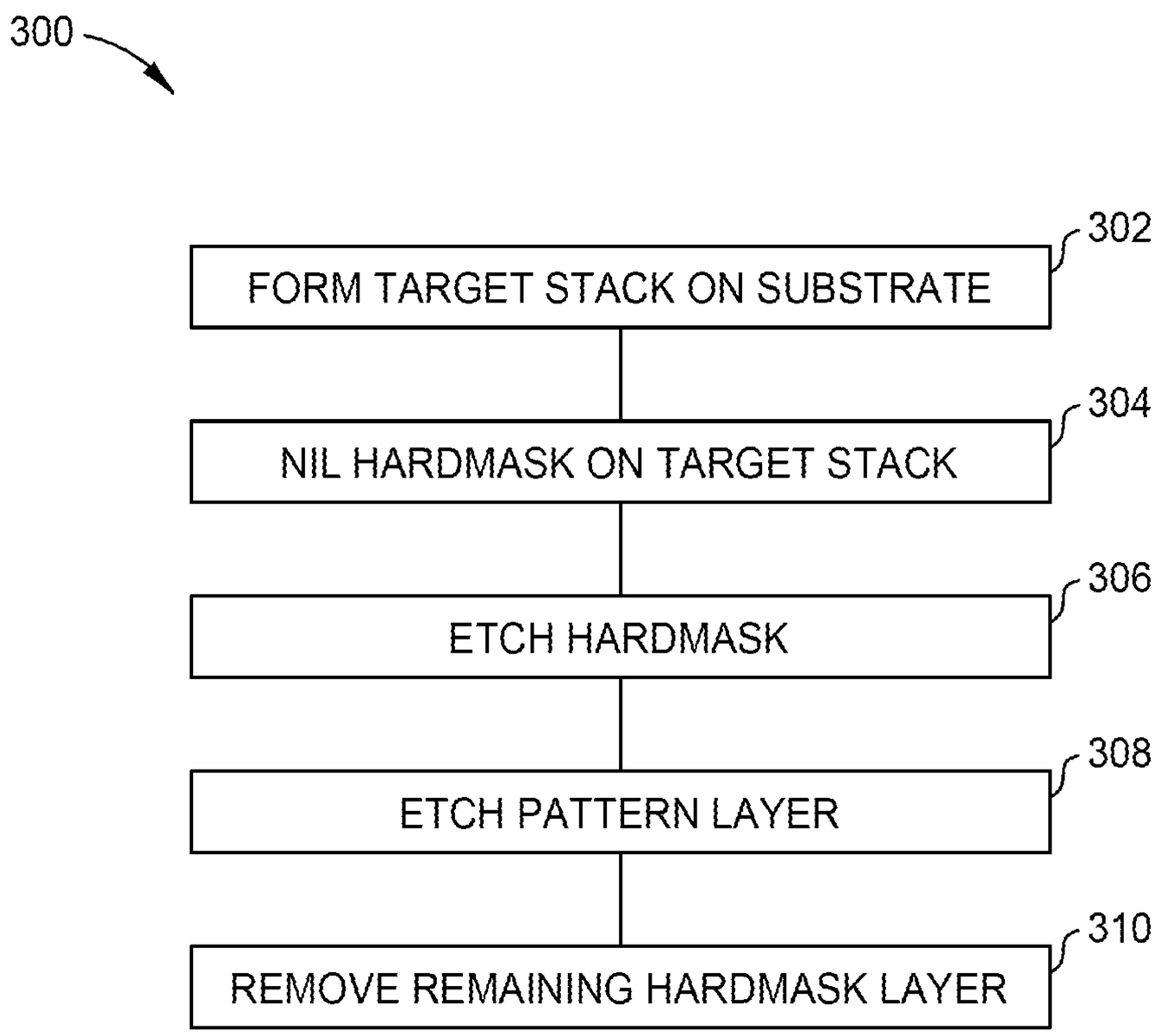

300
FORM TARGET STACK ON SUBSTRATE
302
NIL HARDMASK ON TARGET STACK
304
ETCH HARDMASK
306
ETCH PATTERN LAYER
308
REMOVE REMAINING HARDMASK LAYER
310

FIG. 3

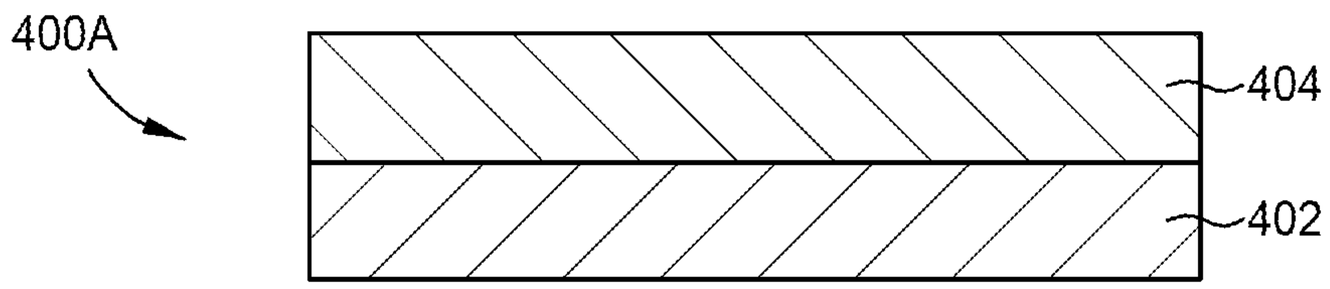


FIG. 4A

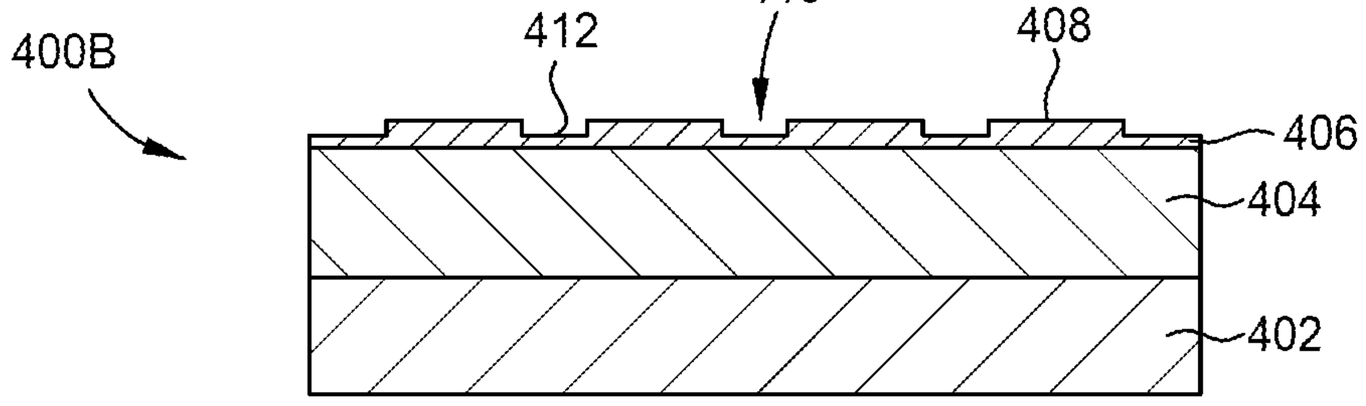


FIG. 4B

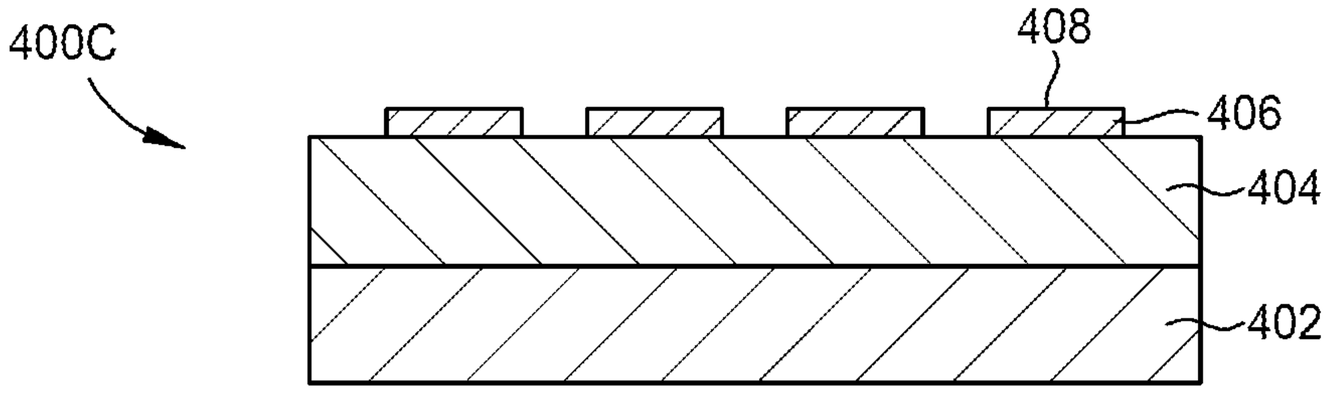


FIG. 4C

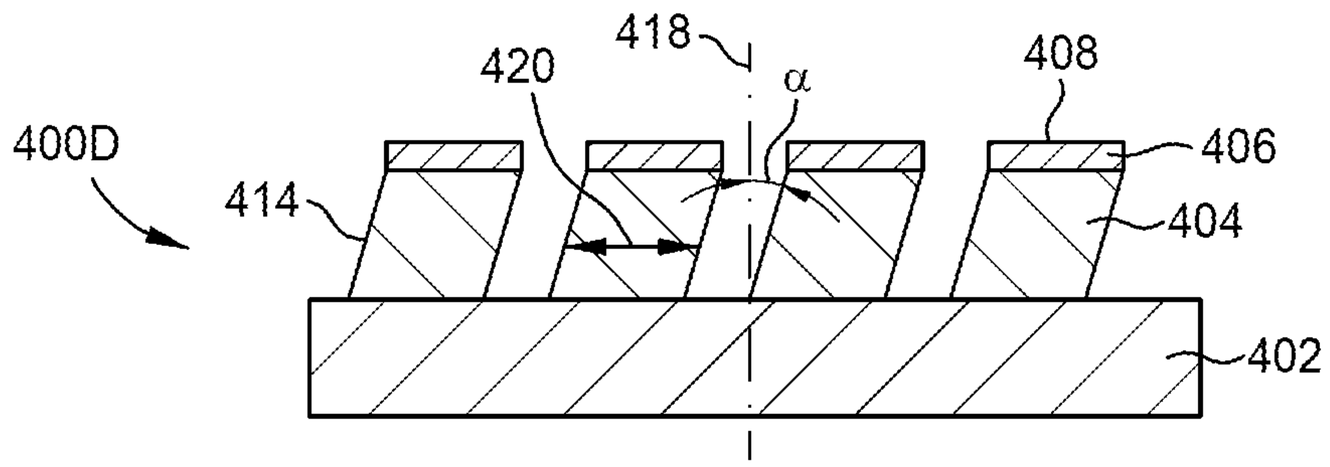


FIG. 4D

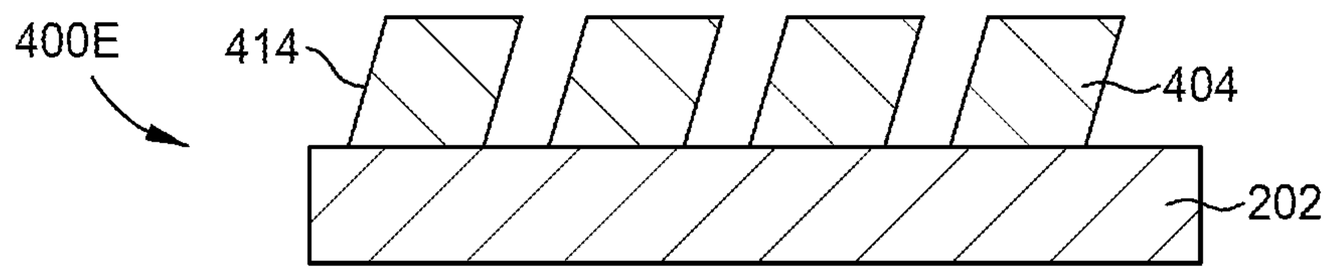


FIG. 4E

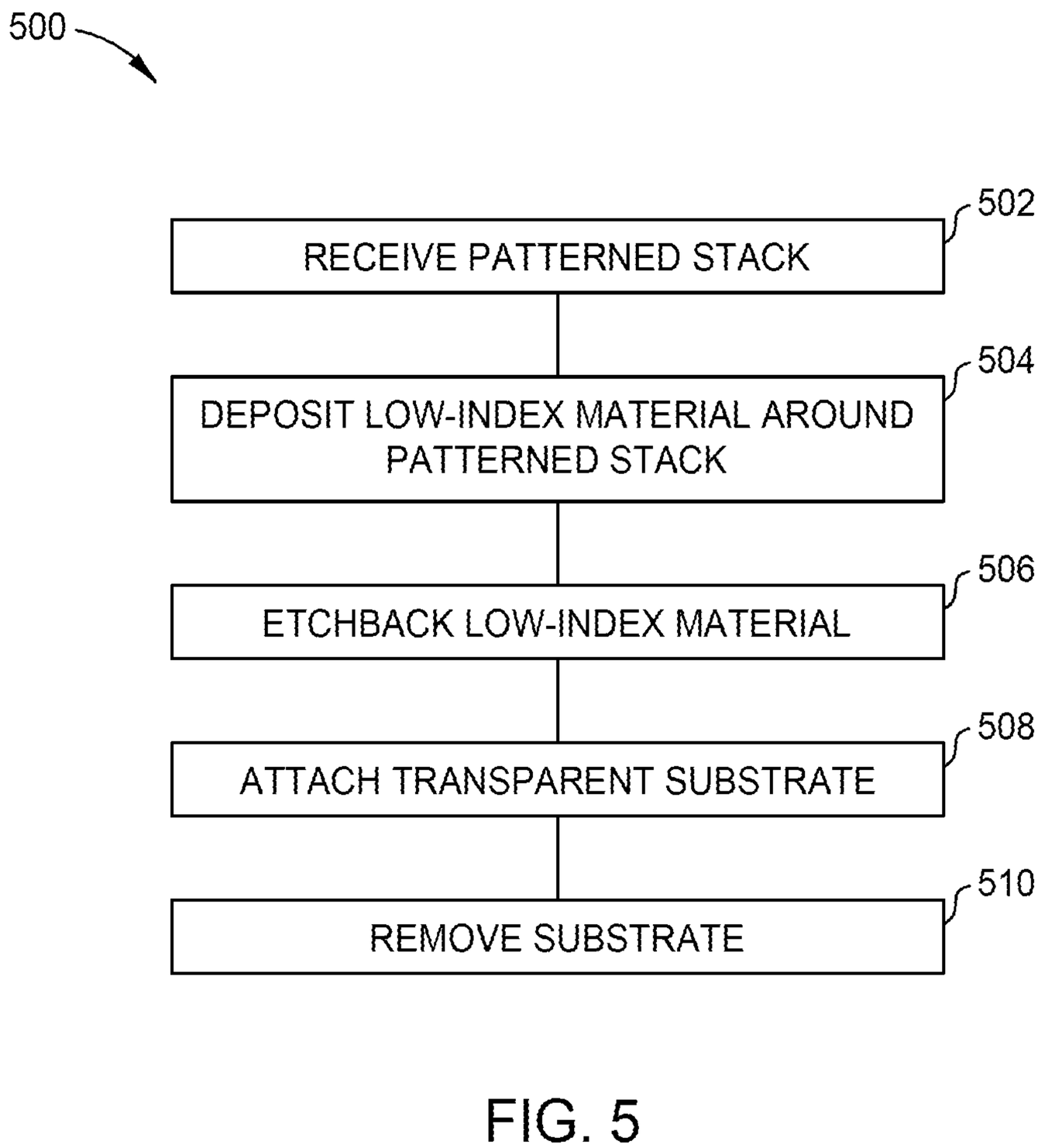

500
RECEIVE PATTERNED STACK
502
DEPOSIT LOW-INDEX MATERIAL AROUND PATTERNED STACK
504
ETCHBACK LOW-INDEX MATERIAL
506
ATTACH TRANSPARENT SUBSTRATE
508
REMOVE SUBSTRATE
510

FIG. 5

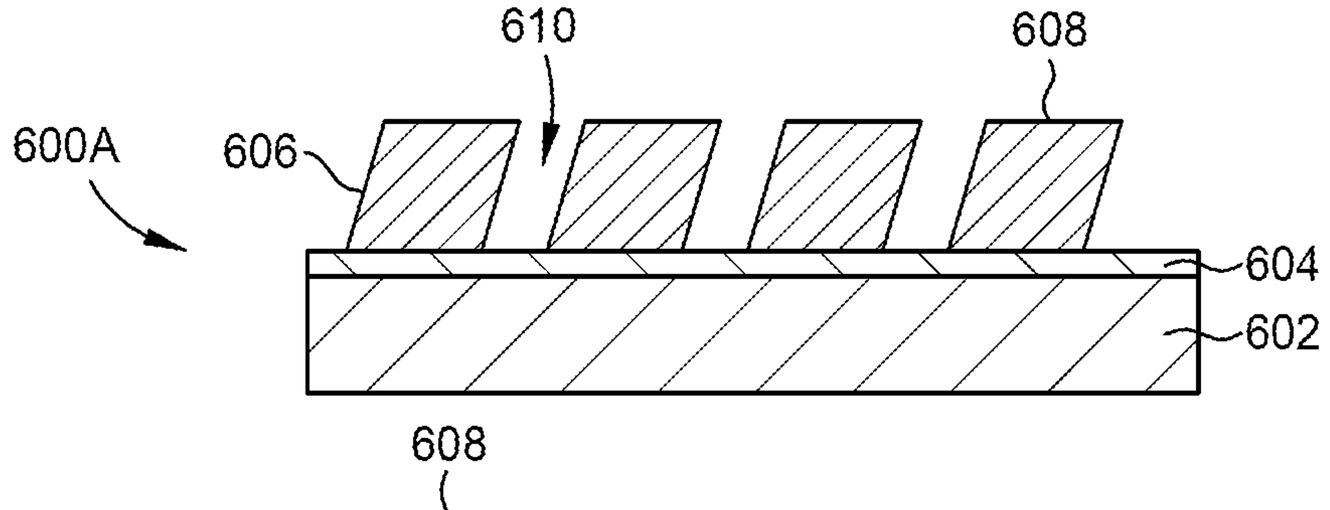


FIG. 6A

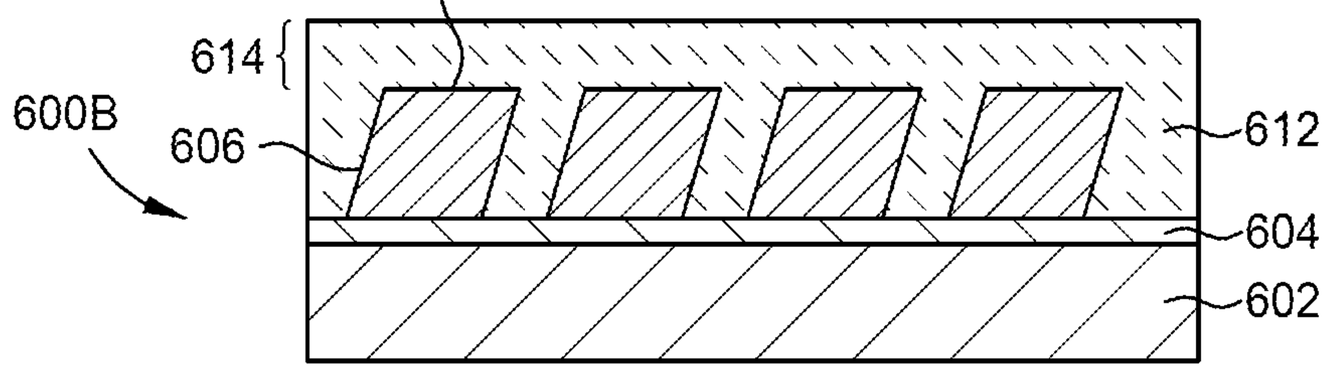


FIG. 6B

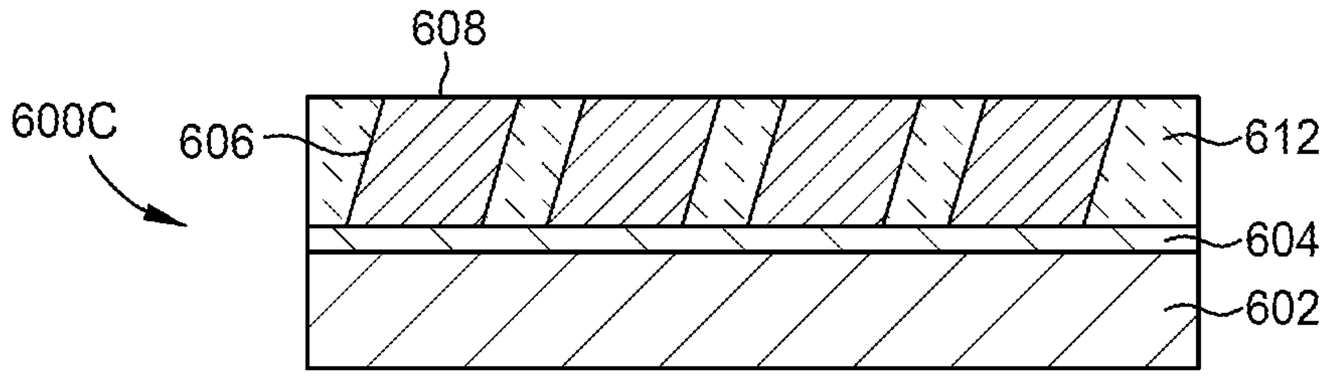


FIG. 6C

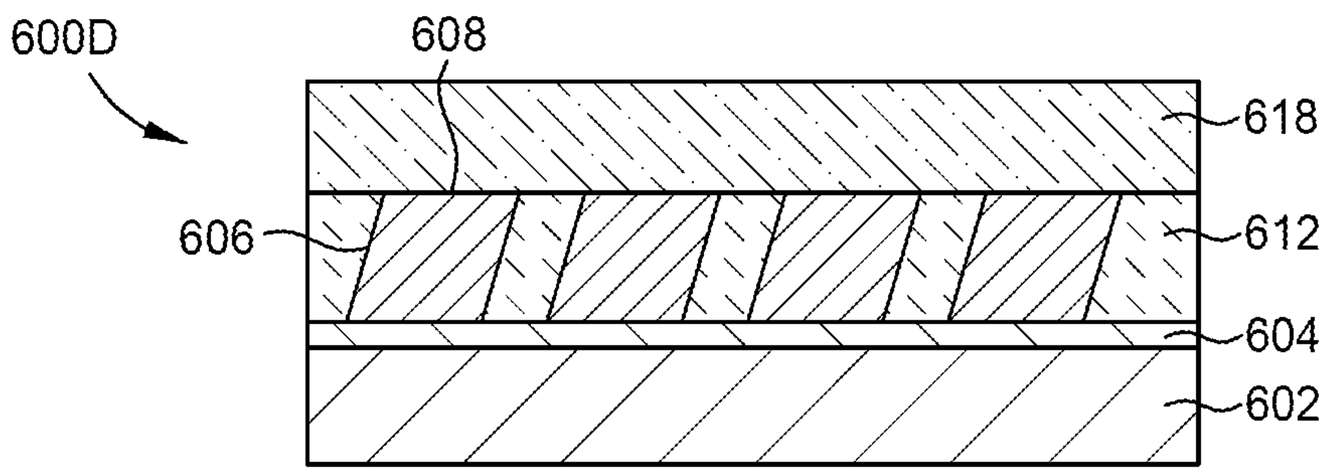


FIG. 6D

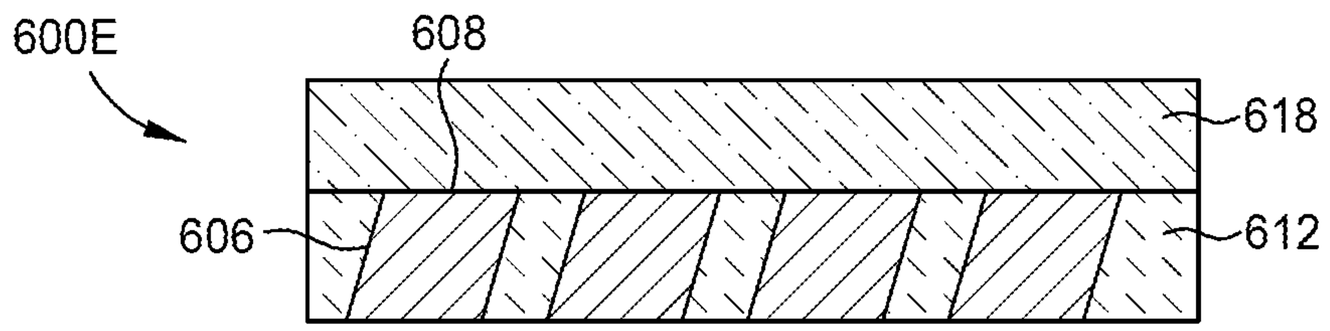


FIG. 6E

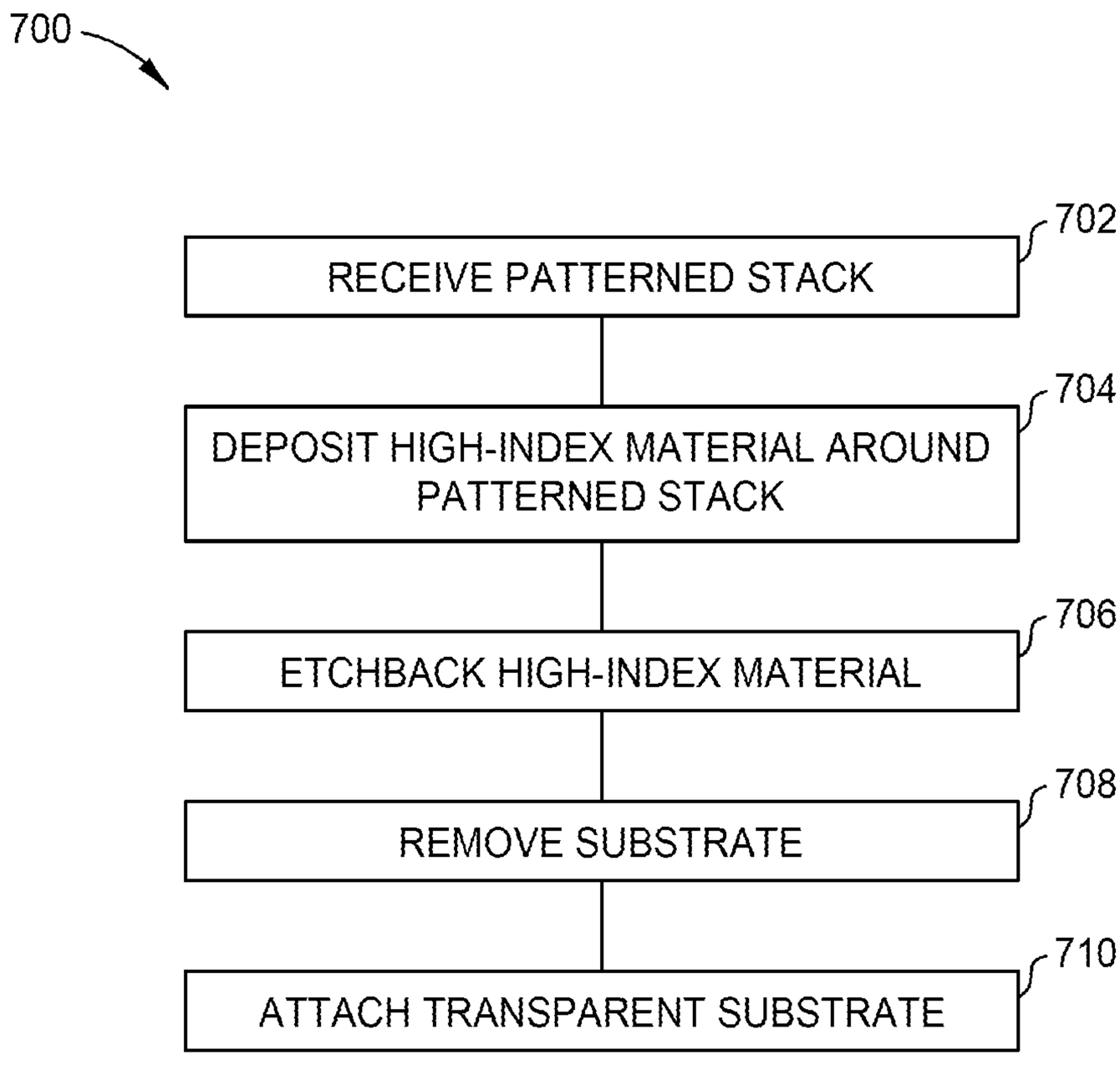

700
RECEIVE PATTERNED STACK
702
DEPOSIT HIGH-INDEX MATERIAL AROUND PATTERNED STACK
704
ETCHBACK HIGH-INDEX MATERIAL
706
REMOVE SUBSTRATE
708
ATTACH TRANSPARENT SUBSTRATE
710

FIG. 7

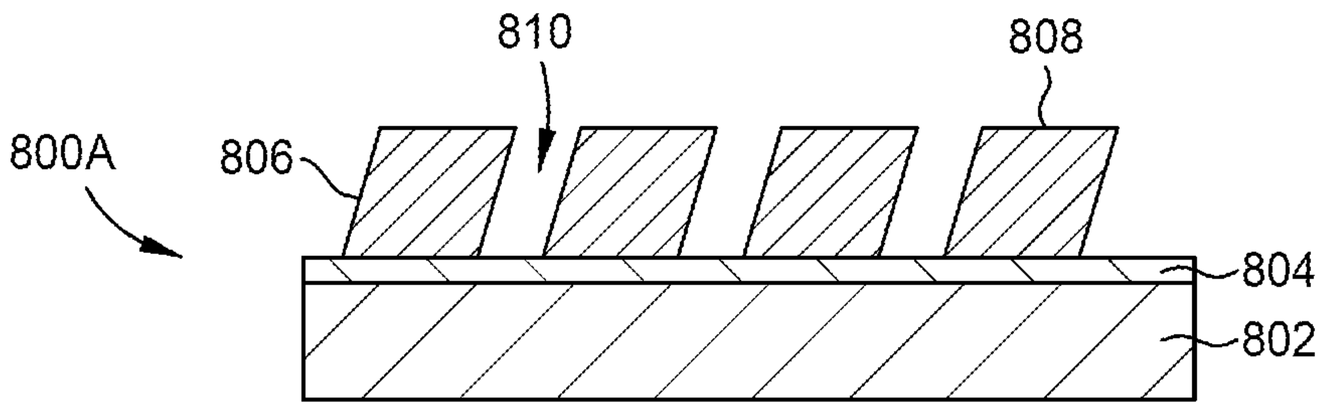


FIG. 8A

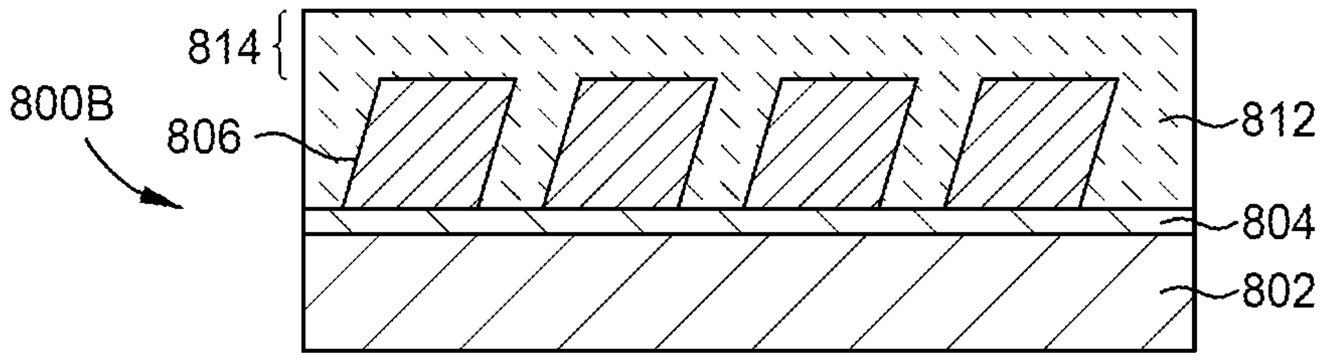


FIG. 8B

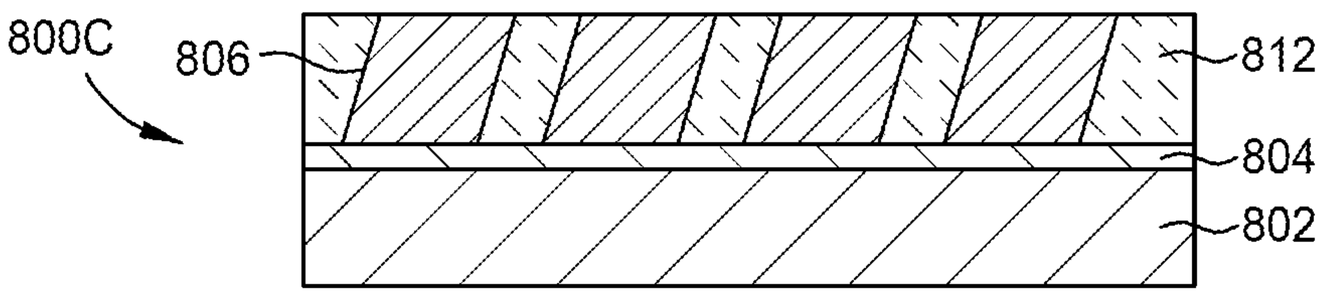


FIG. 8C

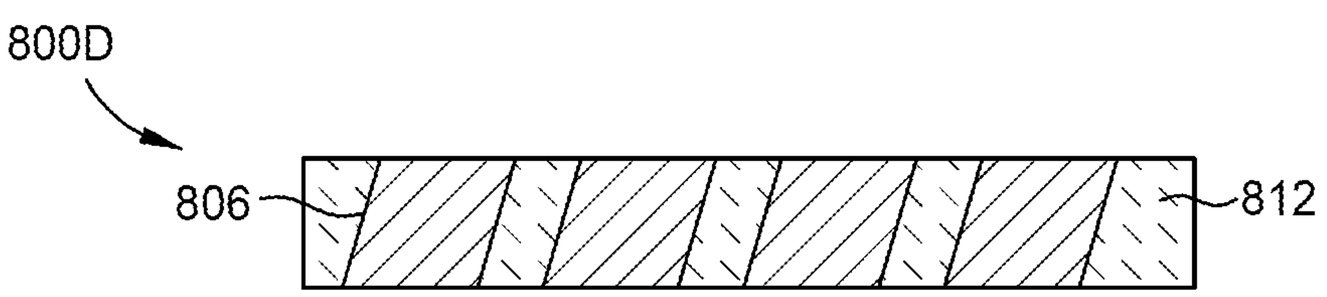


FIG. 8D

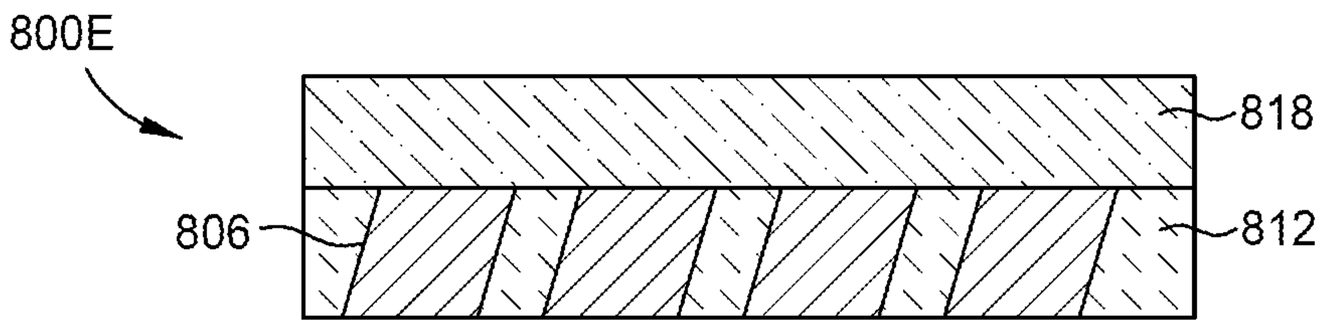


FIG. 8E

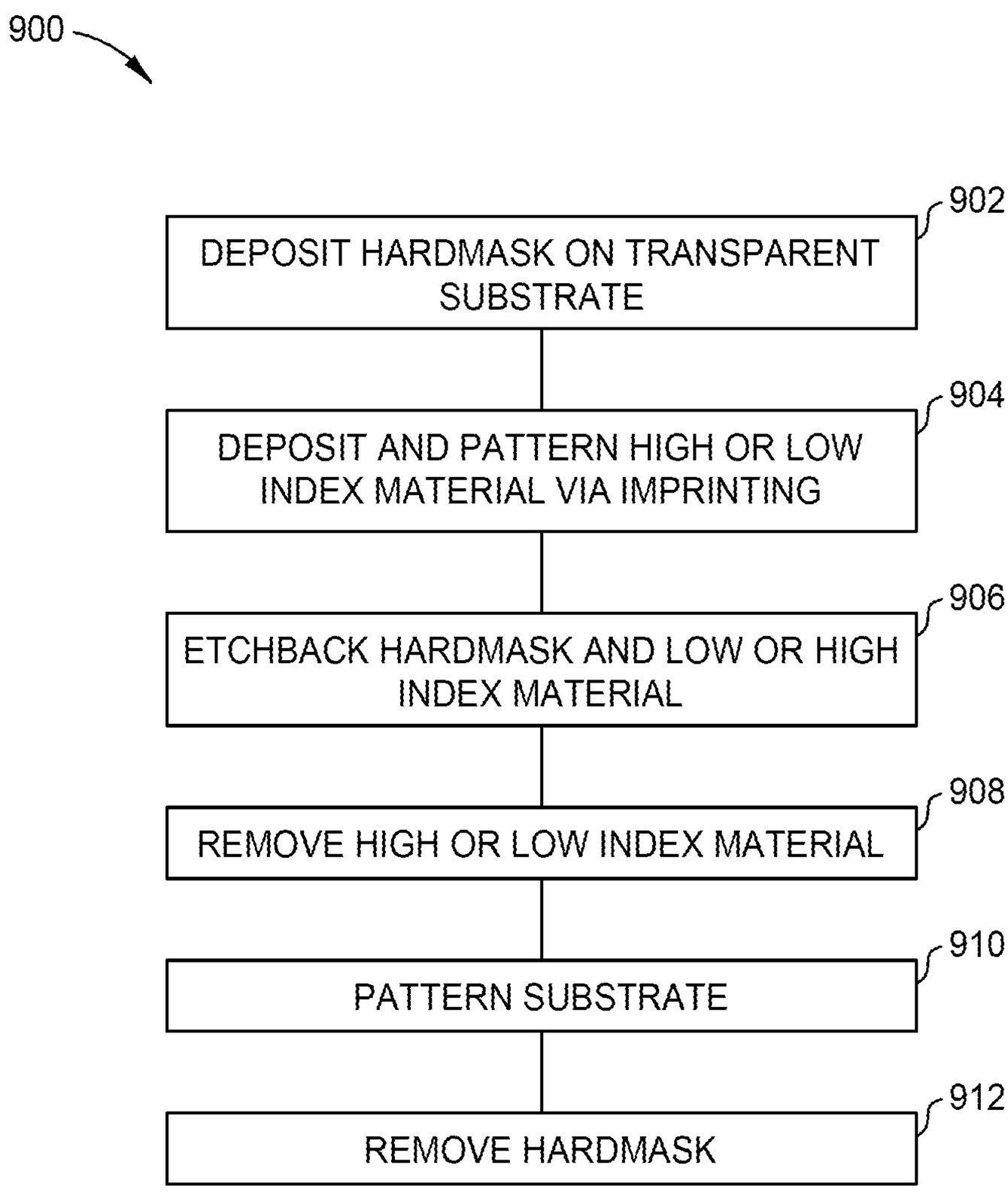

900
902
DEPOSIT HARDMASK ON TRANSPARENT SUBSTRATE
904
DEPOSIT AND PATTERN HIGH OR LOW INDEX MATERIAL VIA IMPRINTING
906
ETCHBACK HARDMASK AND LOW OR HIGH INDEX MATERIAL
908
REMOVE HIGH OR LOW INDEX MATERIAL
910
PATTERN SUBSTRATE
912
REMOVE HARDMASK

FIG. 9

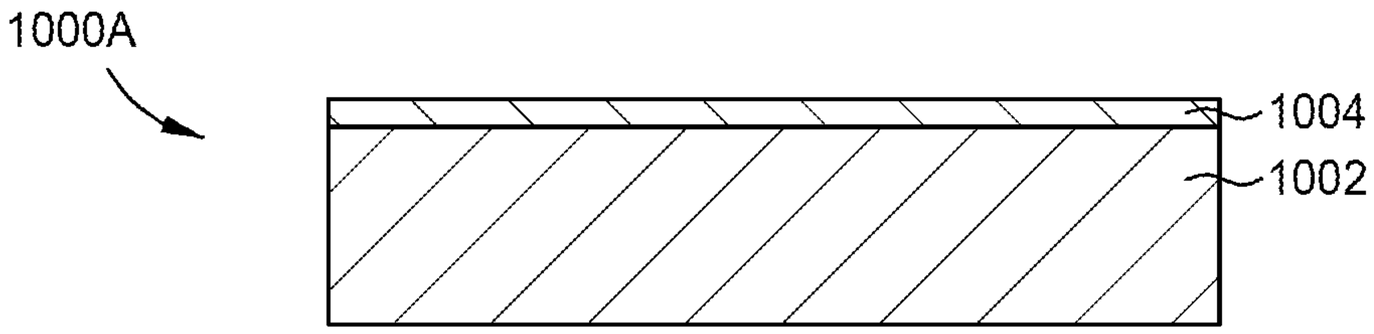


FIG. 10A

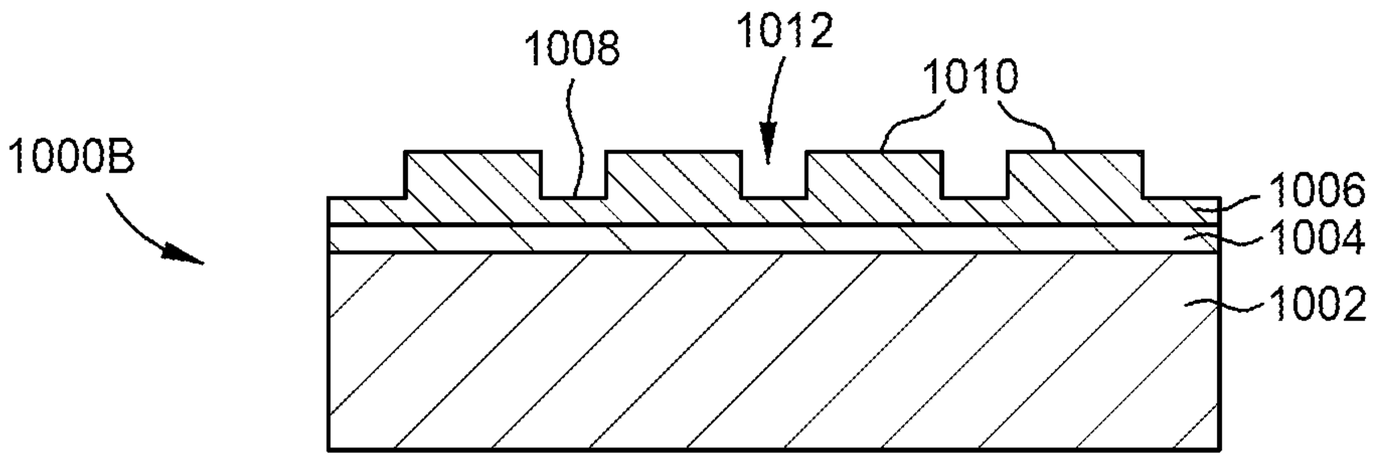


FIG. 10B

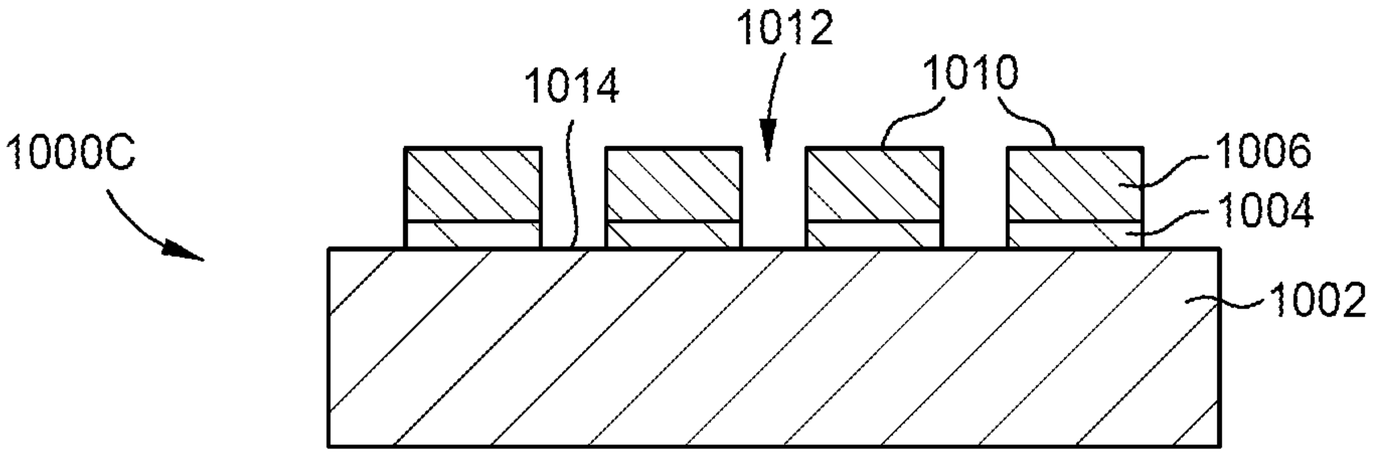


FIG. 10C

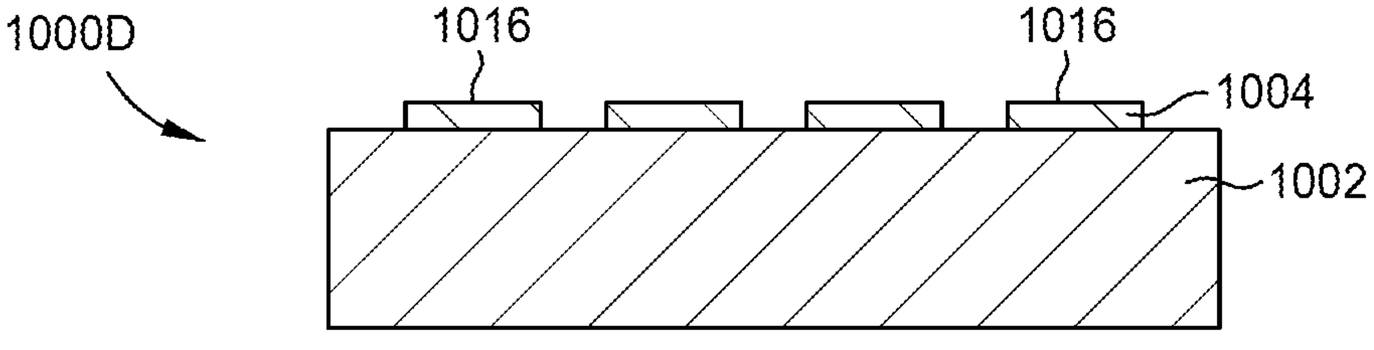


FIG. 10D

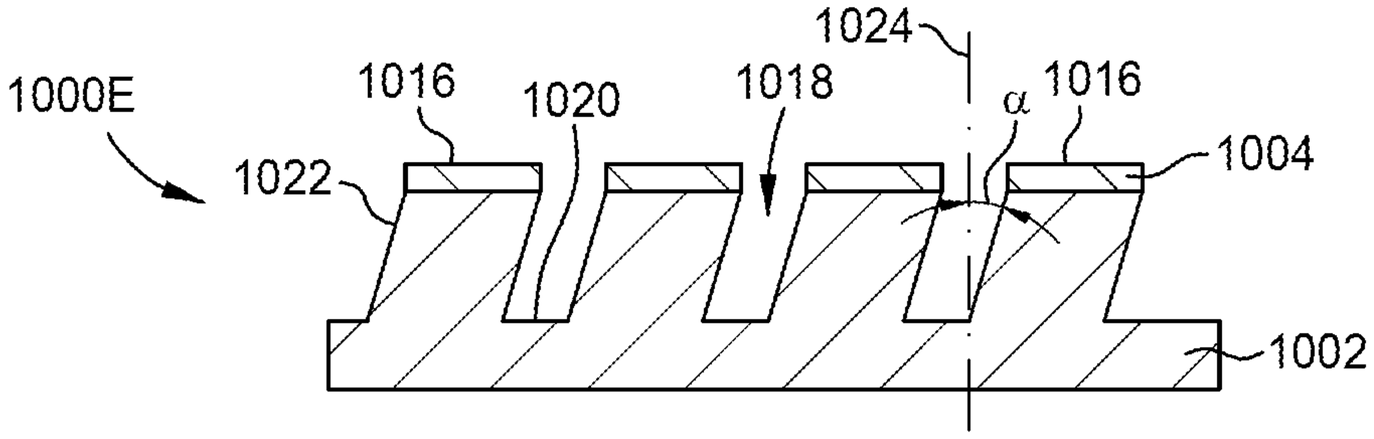


FIG. 10E

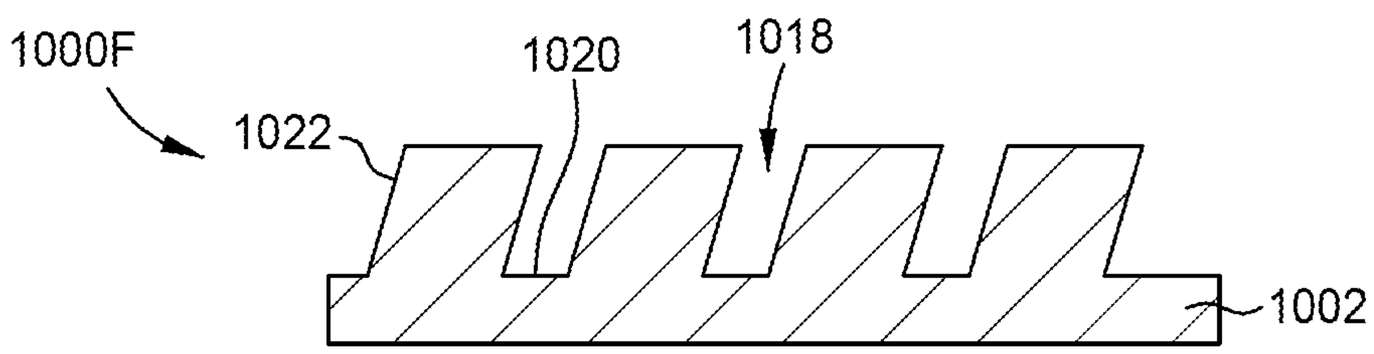


FIG. 10F

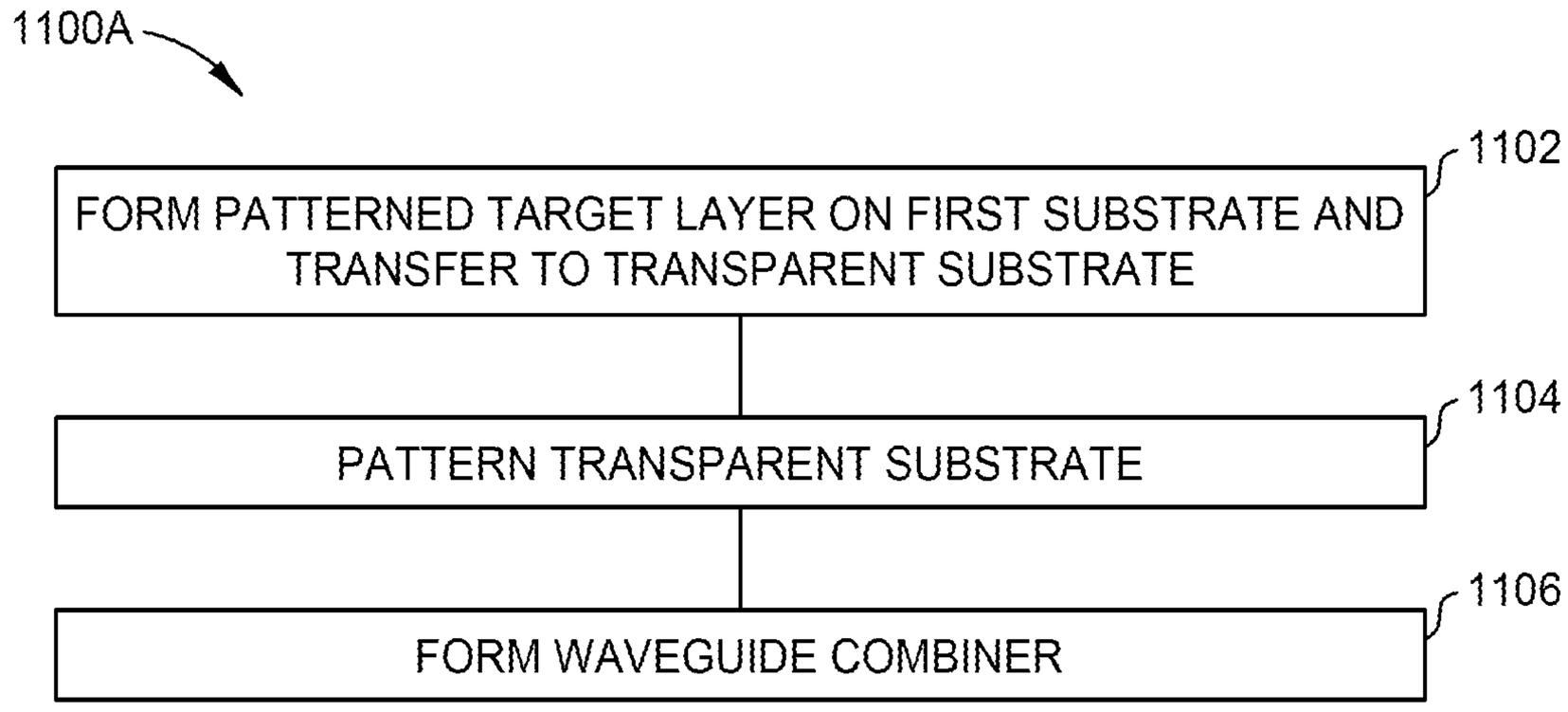


FIG. 11A

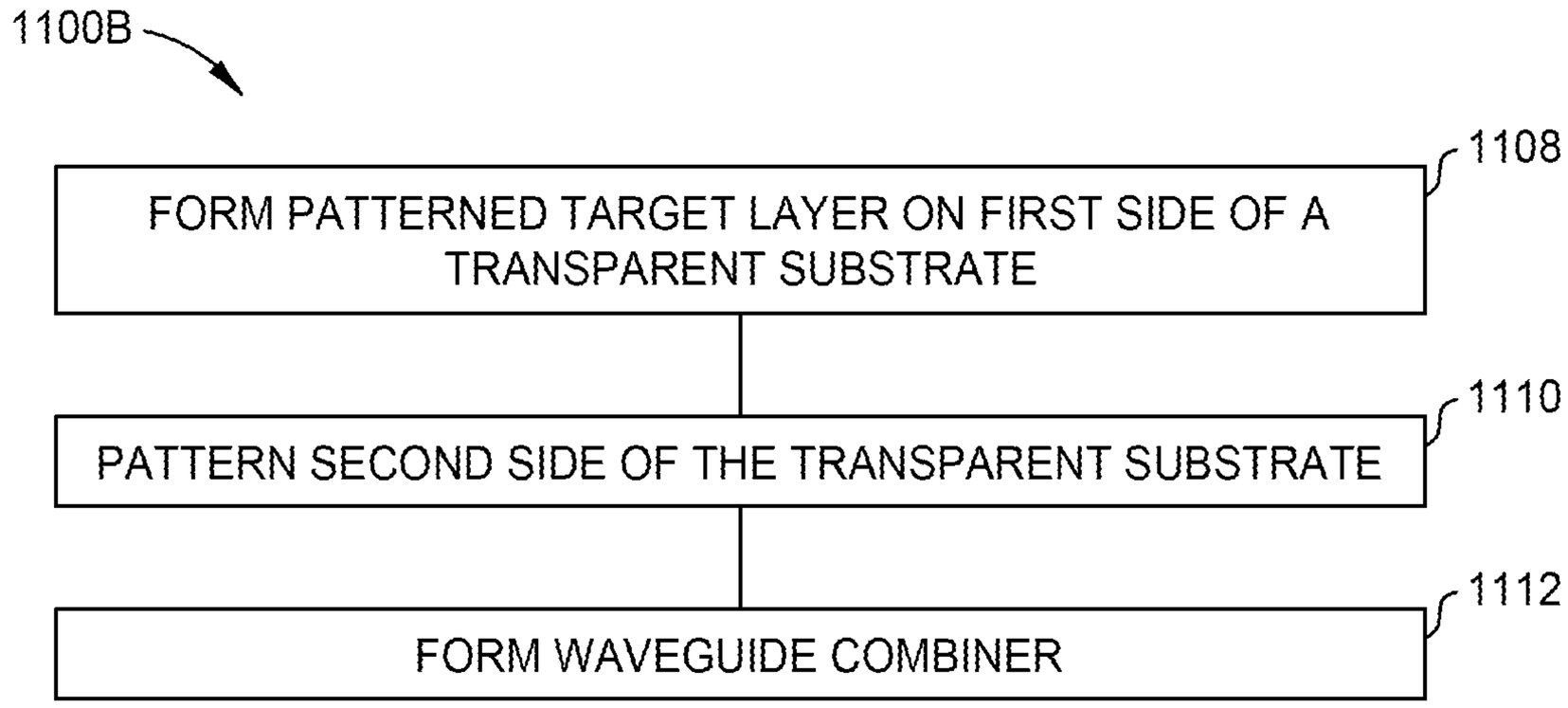


FIG. 11B

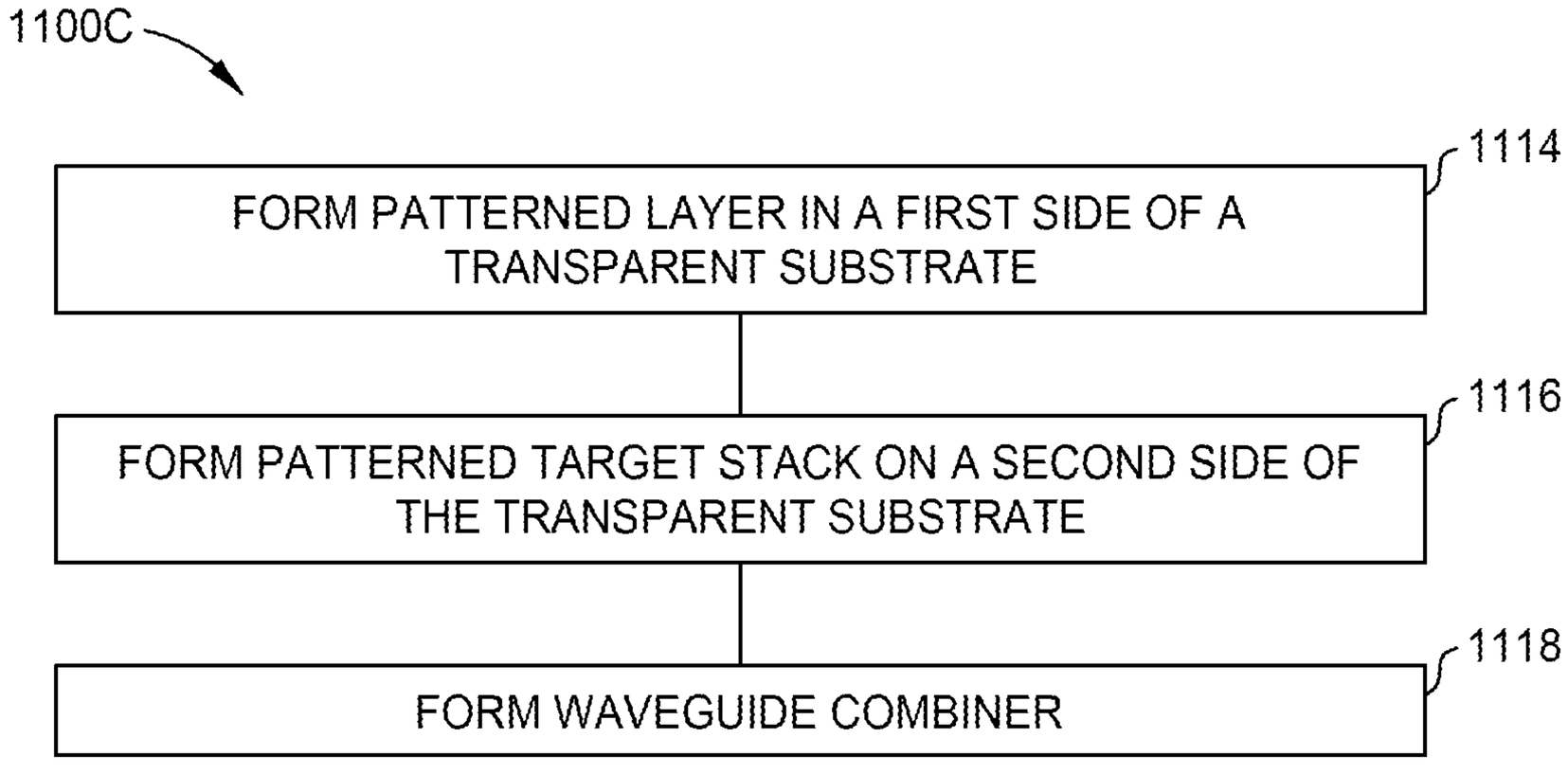


FIG. 11C

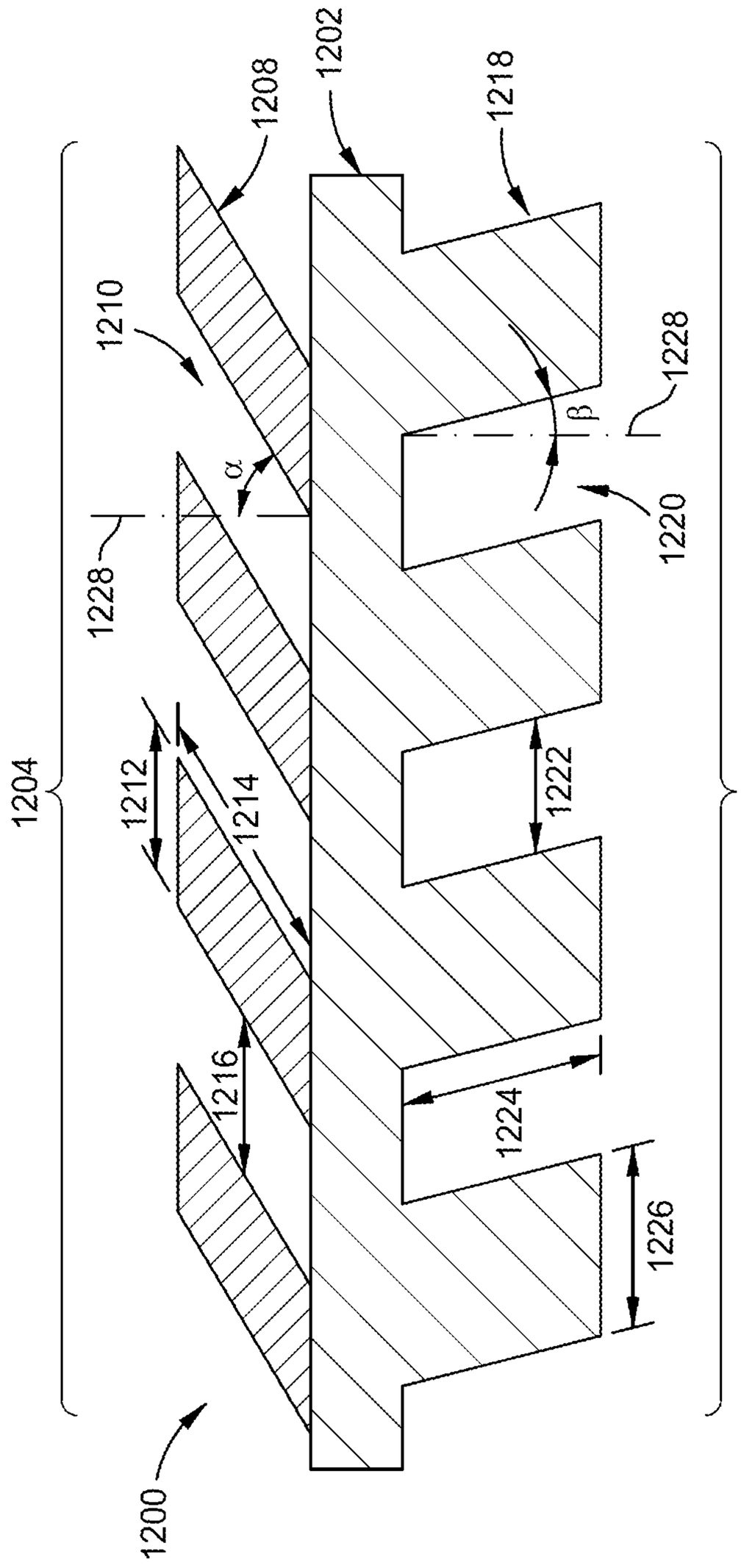

1208
1202
1218
1210
1228
α
β
1228
1220
1204
1212
1214
1222
1206
1216
1224
1226
1200

FIG. 12

FABRICATION OF DIFFRACTION GRATINGS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 16/454,642, filed Jun. 27, 2019, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional App. No. 62/691,421, "Fabrication of Diffraction Gratings," filed Jun. 28, 2018, incorporated herein in its entirety by reference, and U.S. Provisional App. No. 62/692,286, "Fabrication of Diffraction Gratings," filed Jun. 29, 2018. Each of which is incorporated by reference herein in their entirety.

BACKGROUND

Field

The embodiments of the disclosure generally relate to optical element structures and systems and methods of fabricating optical element structures such as those used in various types of waveguides.

Description of the Related Art

Waveguides are structures that guide electromagnetic or sound waves by enabling a signal to propagate with a minimal loss of energy by restricting the expansion of the signal one dimension or two dimensions. Waves propagate in three dimensions, and the wave can lose power as it propagates away from the source that generated the wave, such as a sound wave or an electromagnetic wave. By confining the waves such that they propagate in one or two dimensions, the power of the wave is conserved. The waveguide thus preserves the power of the wave while it propagates.

Waveguide combiners are used to combine signals such as RF signals by accepting multiple input signals and producing a single output signal that is a combination of the input signals. As demand for waveguides increases, for example, in optical fiber applications, radar applications, scientific instrumentation, and augmented reality, a demand for waveguides increases, and current technologies involve making master patterns and doing imprint replication to form a grating, so only materials that are imprint-able can be used for waveguide fabrication.

Thus, there remains a need for systems and methods of improved waveguide manufacturing.

SUMMARY

Systems and methods discussed herein are directed towards methods of forming gratings. In one example, a method of pattering a substrate includes forming a hardmask layer on a first side of a substrate, wherein the substrate is formed from a transparent material and is defined by a normal plane along a width of the substrate; and forming, by nanoimprint lithography, on the hardmask layer, a patterned layer. In the example, the method further includes etching the patterned layer and the hardmask layer to expose the first side of the substrate; removing the patterned layer; and etching the first side of the substrate to form a first plurality of angled mesas in the first side of the substrate. Each angled mesa of the first plurality of angled mesas is etched at an angle from 20 degrees to 70 degrees relative to the normal plane. Further in the method, subsequent to etching the first side of the substrate, removing the hardmask layer.

In another examples, a method of forming a grating includes: forming a hardmask layer on a target stack, wherein the target stack is formed on a first side of a first substrate; etching a plurality of openings in the hardmask layer; and etching the target stack to form a first plurality of angled mesas in the target stack on the first side of the first substrate. Each angled mesa of the first plurality of angled mesas is etched at a first angle from 20 degrees to 70 degrees relative to a normal plane.

In another example, a method of forming a grating includes: forming a hardmask layer on a target stack, wherein the target stack is formed on a first side of a first substrate; etching a plurality of openings in the hardmask layer; and etching the target stack to form a first plurality of angled mesas in the target stack on the first side of the first substrate. Each angled mesa of the plurality of angled mesas is etched at an angle 20 degrees to 70 degrees relative to a normal plane. The method further includes forming a hardmask layer on a second side of the first substrate, wherein the first substrate is defined by a normal plane along a width of the substrate; and forming, by nanoimprint lithography, a patterned layer on the hardmask layer.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

So that the manner in which the above recited features of the present disclosure can be understood in detail, a more particular description of the disclosure, briefly summarized above, may be had by reference to embodiments, some of which are illustrated in the appended drawings. It is to be noted, however, that the appended drawings illustrate only exemplary embodiments and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope, and may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

FIG. **1** is a flow chart of a method of forming a grating structure directly on a transparent substrate according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIGS. **2**A-**2**F are partial schematic illustrations of operations of the formation of a grating structure according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIG. **3** is a flow chart of a method of forming a grating structure directly on a transparent substrate according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIGS. **4**A-**4**E are partial schematic illustrations of the formation of a grating structure according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIG. **5** is a method of transferring a grating structure from a first substrate to a second substrate according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIGS. **6**A-**6**E are partial schematic illustrations of the formation of a grating structure according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIG. **7** is a method of transferring a grating structure from a first substrate to a second substrate according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIGS. **8**A-**8**E are partial schematic illustrations of the formation of a grating structure according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIG. **9** is a method of directly etching a grating structure in a transparent substrate according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIGS. **10**A-**10**F are partial schematic illustrations of the formation of a grating structure according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIGS. **11**A-**11**C are flow charts of methods used to fabricate a waveguide combiner according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIG. **12** is a partial schematic illustration of a waveguide combiner structure fabricated according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

To facilitate understanding, identical reference numerals have been used, where possible, to designate identical elements that are common to the figures. It is contemplated that elements and features of one embodiment may be beneficially incorporated in other embodiments without further recitation.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The systems and methods discussed herein can include the mass production of diffraction gratings used for waveguides. Augmented reality surface relief waveguide combiners are made by a process of mastering and replication. Currently, these waveguide combiners have only been produced in quantities of thousands, whereas future projected volumes are in the tens of millions or greater. Challenges in the current manufacturing process include the reproducibility of the shapes replicated, especially as in high volume production, include concerns regarding the yield in the nanoimprint lithography (NIL) process. Further challenges include the release after the NIL imprinting of high angle gratings since the gratings can be formed at an angle of 45 degrees or greater with respect to the normal plane.

As discussed herein, materials with a low refractive index, "low-index" materials, can include silicon dioxide (SiO_2), doped SiO_2, fluorinated polymers, or porous materials. Materials with a high refractive index, "high-index" materials, can include amorphous and crystalline Si, silicon nitride (SiN), titanium dioxide (TiO_2), gallium phosphate (GaP), tantalum pentoxide (Ta_2O_5), or sulfur-inated materials and polymers.

Discussed herein are systems and methods for fabricating waveguide devices using direct etching and NIL. Waveguide devices including waveguide combiners include a plurality of diffraction gratings formed in a low-index material, a high-index material, or a combination of low and high-index materials, and a plurality of gratings formed in an optically transparent substrate such as polymer or glass. As discussed herein, a "transparent" substrate is a substrate that is optically transparent in a predetermined wavelength range within which the waveguide combiner is intended to operate. As discussed herein, a diffraction grating can be referred to as a "grating" or "gratings" and can include a plurality of angled mesas, which can also be referred to as teeth or fins, and a plurality of troughs formed in between adjacent angled mesas. In some examples, the troughs of a grating do not contain fill material, and in other examples, the troughs of a grating are filled with various materials. In one example, the mesas of a grating can be formed from a low-index material, and the troughs of the grating are filled with a high-index material. In another example, the angled mesas of a grating can be formed from a high-index material, and the troughs of the grating are filled with a low-index material. The angled mesas and troughs within a grating can be uniform in one or more of width, length, spacing, or angle with respect to a normal plane of the substrate. In another example, the angled mesas and troughs of a grating can differ in one or more of width, length, spacing, or angle with respect to a normal plane of the substrate.

As discussed in various embodiments herein, NIL can be used along with direct etching to fabricate a waveguide combiner. In some examples, a double-sided processing method is used to fabricate a waveguide combiner. The double-sided fabrication method includes forming a first grating in a target stack formed of at least one of a low or a high-index material by using NIL on a transparent substrate, and forming a second grating using direct etching on the other side of the same substrate. One of the challenges in a direct etch is performing lithography on glass substrates. For example, a conventional lithography process can be configured to accept a substrate with a maximum thickness of 775 μm due to lithography scanner parameters. Waveguide combiners are currently made using a glass substrate, with a thickness depending on the design, but are typically 0.5 mm or 0.8 mm thick, which is significantly thinner than what the lithography scanner is configured to process.

In one embodiment, a grating is formed using NIL and direct etching on a temporary substrate that can be formed from silicon. The grating is then de-bonded from the temporary substrate and transferred to a second, transparent substrate that can include glass. In another embodiment, the grating is formed via NIL and direct etching on a target layer already disposed on a glass or other transparent substrate. A grating can also be formed using NIL and direct etching in the transparent substrate. High angle gratings are formed using the systems and methods discussed herein, the angles may range from 20 degrees to 70 degrees from a normal plane parallel to the substrate. The waveguides and waveguide components discussed herein are formed by direct etching of the devices, and can be fabricated using temporary or permanent binding, in combination with NIL.

In other examples, waveguide designs with a wide range of duty cycles (DC) (i.e. the radio of the mesa width to the mesa pitch) are desirable. It can be challenging to fabricate this range of duty cycles with NIL due to imprint material shrinkage. However, in some embodiments, this challenge is overcome by imprinting a low index & low duty cycle grating, then filling the low duty cycle grating with a high index material to form a grating with a high duty cycle and a high index grating.

FIG. **1** is a flow chart of a method **100** of forming a grating structure directly on a transparent substrate. FIGS. **2**A-**2**F are partial schematic illustrations of operations of the method **100**. FIGS. **1** and **2**A-**2**F are referenced together below.

At operation **102** of the method **100**, and as shown in a structure **200**A in FIG. **2**A, a target stack **204** is formed on a substrate **202**. The substrate **202** can be formed from a transparent substrate such as a glass or a polymer substrate which can be from 0.5 mm to 0.8 mm. At operation **104**, a hardmask layer **206** is formed over the target stack **204** as shown in FIG. **2**A. The target stack **204** can be fabricated of SiN, TiO_2, GaP, or another high-index material, and is deposited by CVD, PVD, spinning-on, or another appropriate method at operation **102**. In one embodiment, a thickness of the target stack **204** can be from 100 nm to 500 nm, depending on the index and optical wavelength to be used in the finished waveguide combiner device. The hardmask layer **206** can be fabricated from TiN, TaN, Cr, or another etch-resistant material deposited by CVD, PVD, ALD or another thin-film deposition process at operation **104**. The hardmask layer **206** can be formed at operation **104** to a thickness from about 10 nm to about 50 nm. In some examples, a hardmask layer **206** of less than 25 nm thick can be employed to reduce or avoid shadowing during subsequent etching operations.

At operation **106** of the method **100**, and as shown in a structure **200**B in FIG. **2**B, a pattern layer **208** is formed on

the hardmask layer **206** using NIL. The pattern layer **208** is formed of an imprintable resist material. The pattern layer is formed of a plurality of raised features **210**, A plurality of gaps **212** are formed between adjacent pairs of raised features **210**. Each gap of the plurality of gaps **212** has a bottom residual layer **214** of the pattern layer **208**. In an embodiment at operation **106**, the NIL of the hardmask is performed with an angle δ between each of the raised features **210** and the substrate **202**. The angle δ can be greater than 90 degrees, which can decrease cost and promote the formation of subsequent features during directional etching as discussed herein.

Subsequently, at operation **108**, and as shown in a structure **200**C in FIG. **2**C, a portion of the hardmask layer **206** and the pattern layer **208** is removed via etching. As such, a bottom **216** of each gap **212** exposes the target stack **204** and a plurality of hardmask mesas **218** is formed. At operation **110** of the method **100**, as shown in a structure **200**D in FIG. **2**D, the pattern layer **208** is removed, exposing the plurality of hardmask mesas **218**. At operation **112**, as shown in a structure **200**E in FIG. **2**E, the target stack **204** is etched to form a plurality of angled mesas **222** and a plurality of troughs **220** in between the angled mesas **222**, the etching at operation **112** exposes the substrate **202**. The plurality of angled mesas **222** can be formed at an angle α from the normal plane **224** of the substrate **202**. The etching at operation **112** can be referred to as directional etching. The angle α can be from 20 degrees to 70 degrees.

At operation **114**, as shown in a structure **200**F in FIG. **2**F, the remaining portion of the hardmask layer **206** is removed, leaving the plurality of angled mesas **222** and the plurality of troughs **220** formed to a depth of 226. The directional etching discussed herein is performed, in one example, by positioning a first portion of the substrate **202** that is retained on a platen in a first position in a path of an ion beam in an etching chamber. The ion beam can be a ribbon beam, a spot beam, or a full, substrate-size beam that extends across a substrate from a first edge to a second edge that is parallel to the first edge. The ion beam is configured to contact a top surface of a target material, such as the target stack **204**, to form a first grating that includes the angled mesas **222**. The ion beam angle can be from 0 to 90 (i.e. any angle desired), but the ion beam is typically set at the desired etch angle (e.g. 20 to 70 degrees) relative to the normal plane of the substrate **202**, such that the ion beam attacks the target stack **204** at the maximum angle desired. To obtain etches with lower angles than the maximum angle set by the ion beam direction the substrate **202** retained on the platen can be rotated about an axis of the platen to a predetermined rotation angle. The rotation results in the ion beam contacting the top surface of the target stack **204** at a different angle to form a second or other subsequent gratings. The amount of substrate rotation, e.g., the predetermined rotation angle used can be calculated to produce the exact grating etch angle desired.

In an alternate embodiment, the directional etching at operation **112** can be controlled (e.g., control of the etch depth, etch angle, and etch rate) by adjusting a hardmask thickness across the various gratings discussed herein. The hardmask thickness adjustment can be achieved by etching of the hardmask and/or by NIL, in some examples, NIL can be more cost-effective. In this example, when the directional etching at operation **112** is performed, the final depth of the plurality of troughs **220**, as shown by **226** in FIG. **2**F, can vary depending on the thickness of the hardmask layer **206** (formed by NIL at operation **106**) at different locations on the grating.

FIG. **3** is a flow chart of a method **300** of forming a grating structure directly on a transparent substrate. FIGS. **4**A-**4**E are partial schematic illustrations of the method **300**. FIGS. **3** and **4**A-**4**E are discussed together below.

At operation **302** of the method **300**, a target stack **404** is formed on a substrate **402**, as shown in structure **400**A in FIG. **4**A. The substrate **402** is transparent and can be formed from a polymer, glass, ceramic, or other optically transparent materials. The target stack **404** is formed via chemical vapor deposition (CVD) to a thickness from 100 nm to 500 nm. In alternate embodiments, PVD, spinning-on, or ALD can be used to form the target stack **404**. At operation **304**, a hardmask **406** is formed via NIL on the target stack **404**, as shown in structure **400**B in FIG. **4**B. The hardmask **406** is formed as a layer of features **408** and gaps **410** in between adjacent features **408**. A bottom **412** of each gap **410** has the hardmask **406** formed thereon. The hardmask **406** can be fabricated from a metal or metal oxide or metal nitride, including TiN or TaN, or carbon, or from another etch-resistant nano-imprintable material. At operation **306**, as shown in structure **400**C in FIG. **4**C, the bottom **412** layer of hardmask **406** in each gap **410** is removed via etching to expose the target stack **404**. At operation **308**, shown in structure **400**D in FIG. **4**D the target stack **404** is etched to form a plurality of angled mesas **414**. The plurality of angled mesas **414** can be formed at an angle α from the normal plane **418** of the substrate **402**. The angle α can be from 20 degrees to 70 degrees. While each of the plurality of angled mesas **414** is shown in FIG. **4**D with a similar width **420**, in other examples, the widths or other dimensions among and between the angled mesas **414**, including the angle α, can vary. The angled mesas **414** can be formed by directionally etching using tooling configured to direct etchants at an angle relative to the target stack **404**. At operation **310**, the hardmask **406** is removed, as shown in structure **400**E in FIG. **4**E. The method **300** can be used when it may be desirable to form the hardmask **406** in operation **304**, in contrast to methods discussed herein where a hardmask is deposited in a first operation and then patterned in a second operation.

FIG. **5** is a method **500** of transferring a grating structure from a first substrate to a second substrate according to embodiments of the present disclosure. FIGS. **6**A-**6**E are partial schematic illustrations of the method **500**. FIGS. **5** and **6**A-**6**E are discussed together below.

FIG. **6**A illustrates a structure fabricated similarly to the structures fabricated according to the methods **100** and **300** in FIGS. **1** and **3** discussed above. However, instead of being formed on a transparent substrate as discussed above, FIG. **6**A shows a structure **600**A including a grating **606** formed on a first substrate **602** comprising silicon. A de-bonding layer **604** is formed by growing a thin layer of silicon dioxide with CVD, or spinning on a thin adhesive in between the first substrate **602** and the grating **606**. The grating **606** includes a plurality of angled mesas **608** and a plurality of troughs **610** in between each pair of adjacent angled mesas **608**. The first substrate **602** can be formed from silicon. In another example, which can be combined with other examples herein, the grating **606** can be formed from a high-index material, and the de-bonding layer **604** can be formed from a thermally-responsive adhesive or layer of SiO_2. At operation **502** of the method **500**, the structure of FIG. **6**A is received in a process chamber. At operation **504**, a fill layer **612** is deposited in the troughs **610** and over the angled mesas **608** of the grating **606**, as shown in structure **600**B FIG. **6**B. In some examples, during operation **504**, the fill layer **612** forms a layer **614** on top of the angled

mesas **608**. This layer **614** of low-index material is removed at operation **506**, as shown in structure **600**C in FIG. **6**C, via mechanical means, chemical means, or a combination of thereof. At operation **508**, shown in structure **600**D in FIG. **6**D, the structure **600**D is bonded to a glass substrate **618** on a side opposite of where the first substrate **602** was bonded. At operation **510**, shown in structure **600**E in FIG. **6**E, the first substrate **602** is removed via thermal means, such that the de-bonding layer **604** releases from the grating **606**, or by grinding an polishing away the silicon wafer to stop on the SiO_2.

FIG. **7** is a method **700** of transferring a grating structure from a first substrate to a second substrate according to embodiments of the present disclosure. FIGS. **8**A-**8**E are partial schematic illustrations of the method **700**. FIGS. **7** and **8**A-**8**E are referenced together below.

FIG. **8**A illustrates a structure **800**A fabricated similarly to the structures fabricated according to the methods **100** and **300** in FIGS. **1** and **3** discussed above. However, instead of being formed on a transparent substrate as discussed above, FIG. **8**A shows a grating **806** formed on a first substrate **802**. In one example, the first substrate **802** is formed from silicon. A de-bonding layer **804** is formed in between the first substrate **802** and the grating **806**. The grating **806** comprises a plurality of angled mesas **808** and a plurality of troughs **810** in between the angled mesas **808**. In one example, the first substrate **802** can be formed from silicon. In another example, that can be combined with other examples herein, the grating **806** can be formed from a low-index material. The de-bonding layer **804** can be formed from a thermally-responsive adhesive. At operation **702** of the method **700**, the structure of FIG. **8**A is received in a process chamber. At operation **704**, a fill layer **812** is deposited in the troughs **810** and over the angled mesas **608** of the grating **806**, as shown in structure **800**B in FIG. **8**B. In some examples, during operation **704**, the fill layer **812** includes a layer **814** on top of the angled mesas **808**. This layer **814** of high-index material is removed at operation **706**, as shown in structure **800**C in FIG. **8**C, via mechanical means, chemical means, or a combination of thereof. At operation **708**, shown in structure **800**D in FIG. **8**D, the first substrate **802** is removed via thermal means, such that the de-bonding layer **804** releases from the grating **806**. At operation **710**, shown in structure **800**E in FIG. **8**E, the structure **800**D of FIG. **8**D is bonded to a glass substrate **818** on a side opposite of where the first substrate **802** was bonded.

FIG. **9** is a method **900** of directly etching a grating structure in a transparent substrate. FIGS. **10**A-**10**F are partial schematic illustrations of the method **900**. FIGS. **9** and **10**A-**10**F are referenced together below.

In method **900**, at operation **902**, as shown in structure **1000**A in FIG. **10**A, a hardmask **1004** is formed on a transparent substrate **1002**. The transparent substrate **1002** can be formed from glass, polymer, or other materials that are optically transparent. The hardmask **1004** can be formed of TiN, TaN, Cr, or other etch resistant materials, and is formed at operation **902** via CVD, PVD, ALD, or other methods to a thickness from 10 nm to 50 nm. At operation **904**, as shown in structure **1000**B in FIG. **10**B, a pattern is formed by NIL to create layer **1006**. The layer **1006** is formed as a plurality of mesas **1010** and troughs **1012**. A bottom **1008** of each trough **1012** is formed from a residual layer of the material of the layer **1006**. The layer **1006** can be a low-index material or a high-index material, depending upon the embodiment. The layer **1006** is etched, along with the hardmask **1004**, at operation **906** to form structure **1000**C shown in FIG. **10**C. Etching the layer **1006** and the hardmask **1004** at operation **906** exposes the transparent substrate **1002** at the bottom **1014** of the troughs **1012**. At operation **908**, shown in structure **1000**D in FIG. **10**D, the layer **1006** is removed, leaving a plurality of hardmask islands **1016**. At operation **910**, shown in structure **1000**E in FIG. **10**E, the transparent substrate **1002** is etched to form a plurality of angled mesas **1022** with a plurality of troughs **1018** formed in between each adjacent pair of angled mesas **1022**. Each angled mesa **1022** of the plurality of angled mesas **1022** is at an angle α from a normal plane **1024**. A bottom **1020** of each trough **1018** is the substrate material. At operation **912**, shown in FIG. **10**F, the hardmask **1004** is removed, removing the hardmask islands **1016**, leaving behind the structure **1000**F of the transparent substrate **1002**.

FIGS. **11**A-**11**C are flow charts of methods used to fabricate a waveguide combiner according to embodiments of the present disclosure.

FIG. **11**A shows a method **1100**A of forming a diffraction grating, which can be used in a waveguide combiner, according to embodiments of the present disclosure. At operation **1102**, a patterned target layer is formed on a de-bonding layer attached to a first substrate that can be formed from silicon (Si). The operation **1102** can include some or the elements of the methods **500** or **700** in FIG. **5** or **7**, respectively, each of which forms a pattern on a Si substrate, de-bonds the substrate, and attaches a transparent substrate of glass, plastic, or another optically transparent material. The operation **1102** includes the transferring of the patterned target layer, which can be formed from a combination of a high index layer and a low index layer, depending upon the embodiment. In one example, the operation **1102** includes transferring the patterned target layer to a first side of a transparent substrate. At operation **1104**, a second side of the transparent substrate is patterned, for example, according to the method **900** in FIG. **9**, to form the waveguide combiner at operation **1106**.

FIG. **11**B shows a method **1100**B of forming one or more diffraction gratings, which can be used in a waveguide combiner, according to embodiments of the present disclosure. At operation **1108**, a patterned target layer is formed a transparent substrate, similar to what is described in the methods **100** and **300** in FIGS. **1** and **3**. At operation **1110**, the second side of the transparent substrate is patterned, for example, according to the method **900** in FIG. **9**, to form the waveguide combiner at operation **1112**.

FIG. **11**C shows a method **1100**C of forming one or more diffraction gratings, which can be used in a waveguide combiner, according to embodiments of the present disclosure. At operation **1114**, a patterned layer is formed in a first side of a transparent substrate that can be formed from glass or polymer, operation **1114** can be executed according to the method **900** in FIG. **9**. At operation **1116**, a patterned target layer is formed on a second side of the transparent substrate according to a method **100** or **300** as shown in FIGS. **1** and **3** to form the waveguide combiner at operation **1118**.

FIG. **12** is a partial schematic illustration of a waveguide combiner structure **1200** fabricated through the methods of FIGS. **11**A-**11**C. FIG. **12** shows the waveguide combiner structure **1200** comprising a transparent substrate **1202**, and a first grate structure **1204** formed according to embodiments of the present disclosure, including the methods **100**, **300**, **500**, and **700** in FIGS. **1**, **3**, **5**, and **7**, respectively. The first grate structure **1204** is shown in the example in FIG. **12** as comprising the angled mesas **1208**, each of which are formed at an angle of a with respect to a normal plane **1228**. The angle α can be from 20 degrees to 70 degrees. Each

angled mesa **1208** can be formed from low-index material or high-index material, depending upon the embodiment. While a plurality of troughs **1210** are shown in FIG. **12** in between each pair of adjacent angled mesas **1208** as not comprising a material, in alternate embodiments, the troughs **1210** are filled with a low-index or a high-index material. If the angled mesas **1208** are formed from a low-index material, the troughs **1210** can be filled with a high-index material, and, if the angled mesas **1208** are formed from a high-index material, the troughs **1210** can be filled with a low-index material. Each angled mesa **1208** has a width **1212**, a length **1214**, and a spacing **1216** between adjacent angled mesas **1218**. Each of the width **1212**, the length **1214**, and the spacing **1216** is shown in the example waveguide combiner structure **1200** as being substantially the same, as are the angles α. However, in other examples, one or more of these dimensions may vary among and between individual angled mesas **1208** or among and between groups, such as rows, columns, or combinations thereof.

The waveguide combiner structure **1200** further includes a second gate structure **1206** comprising a plurality of angled mesas **1218**, formed in the transparent substrate **1202**. A plurality of troughs **1220** are formed in between each adjacent pair of angled mesas **1218**, and the angled mesas **1218** are formed at an angle of β with respect to the normal plane **1228**. The angle β can be less than or equal to about 45 degrees. Each angled mesa **1218** is formed a distance from 1222 from an adjacent angled mesa **1218**, and has a width **1226** and a length **1224**. The distances **1222** in between angled mesas **1218** as well as the width **1226** and the length **1224** are shown as being substantially the same among and between angled mesas **1218**. However, in alternate embodiments, one or more of these dimensions may vary among and between individual angled mesas **1218** or among and between groups, such as rows, columns, or combinations thereof.

Accordingly, using the systems and methods for waveguides and waveguide combiners discussed herein, waveguides and waveguide combiners that have a wide range of duty cycles (DC) (i.e. the radio of the mesa width to the mesa pitch) are fabricated. In one example, the challenge of shrinkage of the imprinted materials is overcome by imprinting a low index & low duty cycle grating. The imprinted structures are then filled with a high index material to form a grating with a high duty cycle and a high index grating. The examples of diffracting grating formation discussed herein can be combined with other examples herein to form diffraction gratings included in waveguides and waveguide combiners.

Although various embodiments which incorporate the teachings of the present invention have been shown and described in detail herein, those skilled in the art can readily devise many other varied embodiments that still incorporate these teachings.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of patterning a substrate, comprising:

forming a hardmask layer on a first side of a substrate, wherein the substrate is formed from a transparent material and is defined by a normal plane along a width of the substrate;

forming, on the hardmask layer, a patterned layer;

etching the patterned layer and the hardmask layer to expose the first side of the substrate;

removing the patterned layer;

etching the first side of the substrate to form a first plurality of angled mesas in the first side of the substrate, wherein each angled mesa of the first plurality of angled mesas is etched at an angle from 20 degrees to 70 degrees relative to the normal plane;

subsequently, removing the hardmask layer; and

forming a second plurality of angled mesas on a second side of the substrate, the second plurality of angled mesas being at a different angle than the first plurality of angled mesas.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein forming the hardmask layer on the first side of the substrate comprises using chemical vapor deposition (CVD), physical vapor deposition (PVD), or atomic layer deposition (ALD).

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein the transparent material comprises a glass or a polymer.

4. The method of claim **1**, wherein forming the patterned layer comprises using nanoimprint.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein nanoimprint lithography is used in the forming of the second plurality of angled mesas on the second side of the substrate.

6. A method of forming a diffraction grating, comprising:

forming a first hardmask layer on a target stack, wherein the target stack is formed on a first side of a first substrate;

etching a plurality of openings in the first hardmask layer;

etching the target stack to form a first plurality of angled mesas in the target stack on the first side of the first substrate, wherein each angled mesa of the first plurality of angled mesas is etched at a first angle from 20 degrees to 70 degrees relative to a normal plane;

removing the first substrate from the etched target stack;

attaching the etched target stack to a first side of a second substrate;

forming a second hardmask layer on a second side of a second substrate, wherein the second substrate comprises a transparent material and is defined by a normal plane along a width of the second substrate;

forming a patterned layer on the second hardmask layer;

etching the patterned layer and the second hardmask layer to expose the second side of the second substrate;

removing the patterned layer;

etching the second side of the second substrate; and

forming, in response to the etching, a second plurality of angled mesas in the second side of the second substrate, wherein each angled mesa of the second plurality of angled mesas is etched at a second angle from 20 degrees to 70 degrees relative to the normal plane.

7. The method of claim **6**, wherein forming the first hardmask layer comprises using nanoimprint lithography (NIL) to deposit the first hardmask layer as a pattern, wherein the pattern comprises a third plurality of mesas and a plurality of angled troughs in between adjacent mesas of the third plurality of mesas.

8. The method of claim **6**, wherein forming the patterned layer comprises using nanoimprint lithography.

9. The method of claim **6**, wherein the second substrate is a transparent substrate.

10. The method of claim **6**, wherein the target stack is bonded to the first substrate via a de-bonding layer, wherein removing the first substrate comprises detaching the first substrate from the target stack via the de-bonding layer.

11. The method of claim **10**, wherein forming the patterned layer comprises using nanoimprint lithograph.

12. The method of claim **6**, further comprising etching each of the target stack and the second side of the second substrate using directional etching.

13. The method of claim **12**, wherein directional etching comprises:

positioning a first portion of the target stack in a path of an ion beam, the ion beam being at the first angle relative to the normal plane of the first substrate, wherein etching the first portion of the target stack comprises exposing the first portion of the target stack to the ion beam to form the first plurality of angled mesas at the first angle; and

rotating the first substrate about a central axis perpendicular to the normal plane to a predetermined rotation angle.

14. The method of claim **13**, further comprising positioning a second portion of the target stack in the path of the ion beam after rotating the first substrate to the predetermined rotation angle; and

etching the second portion of the target stack to form a third plurality of mesas by exposing the second portion of the target stack to the ion beam.

15. A method of forming diffraction gratings, comprising:

forming a hardmask layer on a target stack, wherein the target stack is formed on a first side of a first substrate;

etching a plurality of openings in the hardmask layer;

etching the target stack to form a first plurality of angled mesas in the target stack on the first side of the first substrate, wherein each angled mesa of the plurality of angled mesas is etched at an angle 20 degrees to 70 degrees relative to a normal plane;

forming a hardmask layer on a second side of the first substrate, wherein the first substrate is defined by a normal plane along a width of the first substrate;

forming a patterned layer on the hardmask layer;

etching the patterned layer and the hardmask layer to expose the second side of the first substrate;

removing the patterned layer; and

etching the second side of the first substrate.

16. The method of claim **15**, wherein forming the patterned layer comprises using nanoimprint lithography.

17. The method of claim **15**, further comprising: forming, in response to the etching, a plurality of angled mesas in the second side of the first substrate.

18. The method of claim **17**, wherein each angled mesa of the plurality of angled mesas is etched at an angle from 20 degrees to 70 degrees relative to the normal plane.

19. The method of claim **18**, wherein forming the hardmask layer on the first substrate comprises using chemical vapor deposition (CVD), physical vapor deposition (PVD), or atomic layer deposition (ALD).

20. The method of claim **15**, wherein the first substrate is optically transparent and comprises a glass or a polymer.

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