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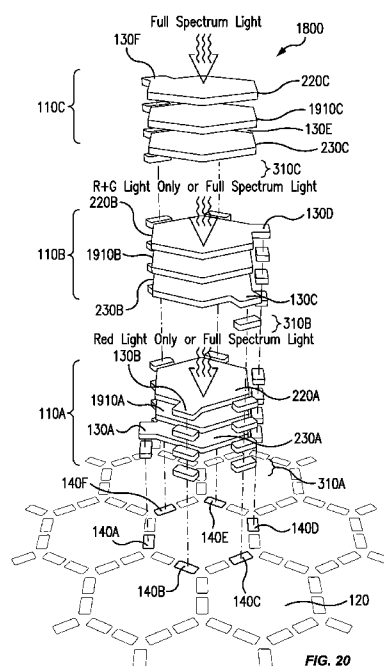
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(54) Title: STACKED TRANSPARENT PIXEL STRUCTURES FOR IMAGE SENSORS



(57) Abstract: In one embodiment, a pixel for an image sensor includes a first subpixel and a second subpixel stacked on top of the first subpixel. Each of the first and second subpixels include a polygon shape. Each of the first and second subpixels include a photodetector layer, a transparent cathode layer, and a transparent anode layer.



STACKED TRANSPARENT PIXEL STRUCTURES FOR IMAGE SENSORS

TECHNICAL FIELD

[1] This disclosure relates generally to pixels and more particularly to stacked transparent pixel structures for image sensors.

BACKGROUND

[2] Pixels are utilized in a variety of electronic displays and sensors. For example, displays used in smartphones, laptop computers, and televisions utilize arrays of pixels to display images. As another example, sensors used in cameras utilize arrays of pixels to capture images. Pixels typically include subpixels of various colors such as red, green, and blue.

SUMMARY OF PARTICULAR EMBODIMENTS

In one embodiment, a system includes a substrate, a plurality of hexagon-shaped pixels coupled to the substrate, and a plurality of connector columns that electrically couple subpixels to the substrate. Each hexagon-shaped pixel includes a first subpixel formed on the substrate, a second subpixel stacked on top of the first subpixel, and a third subpixel stacked on top of the second subpixel. Each of the first, second, and third subpixels include a photodetector layer located between a transparent cathode layer and a transparent anode layer. Each transparent cathode layer and transparent anode layer of each subpixel is electrically coupled to the substrate through a respective one of the plurality of connector columns.

[3] In another embodiment, a pixel for an image sensor includes a first subpixel and a second subpixel stacked on top of the first subpixel. Each of the first and second subpixels include a polygon shape. Each of the first and second subpixels include a photodetector layer, a transparent cathode layer, and a transparent anode layer.

[4] In another embodiment, a method of manufacturing a pixel for an image sensor includes creating a first subpixel by performing at least four steps. The first step includes creating a transparent insulating layer by depositing a layer of transparent insulating material and then patterning the layer of transparent insulating material using lithography. The second step includes creating a transparent cathode layer of a subpixel by depositing a layer of transparent conductive material on the patterned transparent insulating layer and then patterning the transparent cathode layer using lithography, wherein patterning the transparent cathode layer comprises forming a portion of the transparent cathode layer into a polygon shape. The third step includes creating a photodetector layer of the subpixel by depositing a layer of photodetecting material on the patterned transparent cathode layer and then patterning the photodetector layer using lithography, wherein patterning the photodetector layer comprises forming a portion of the photodetector layer into the polygon shape. The fourth step includes creating a transparent anode layer of the subpixel by depositing a layer of transparent anode material on the patterned photodetector layer and then patterning the transparent anode layer using lithography, wherein patterning the transparent anode layer comprises forming a portion of the transparent anode layer into the polygon shape. The method further includes creating

a second subpixel on top of the first subpixel by repeating the first, second, third, and fourth steps.

[5] The present disclosure presents several technical advantages. In some embodiments, three subpixels (e.g., red, green, and blue) are vertically stacked on top of one another to create either display or sensor pixels. By vertically stacking the RGB subpixel components, certain embodiments remove the need for color filters and polarizers which are typically required in pixel technologies such as liquid crystal displays (LCD) and organic light-emitting diode (OLED). This results in smaller pixel areas and greater pixel densities for higher resolutions than typical displays. Some embodiments utilize electroluminescent quantum dot technology that provides more efficient use of power and significantly higher contrast ratios than technologies such as LCD can offer. Additionally, because each subpixel may be controlled directly by voltage, faster response times are possible than with technologies such as LCD. Embodiments that utilize quantum dots that are finely tuned to emit a very narrow band of color provide purer hues and improved color gamut over existing technologies such as OLED and LCD. Thin film design of certain embodiments results in substantial weight and bulk reduction. These and other advantages result in a low-cost, power efficient electronic display/sensor solution capable of high dynamic range output with a small enough pixel pitch to meet the needs of extremely high-resolution applications.

[6] Other technical advantages will be readily apparent to one skilled in the art from FIGURES 1 through 21, their descriptions, and the claims. Moreover, while specific advantages have been enumerated above, various embodiments may include all, some, or none of the enumerated advantages.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[7] For a more complete understanding of the present disclosure and its advantages, reference is now made to the following description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

[8] FIG. 1 illustrates a single display pixel with vertically stacked subpixels, according to certain embodiments;

[9] FIGS. 2-3 illustrate exploded views of the display pixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[10] FIG. 4 illustrates an array of pixels with stacked subpixels, according to certain embodiments;

[11] FIG. 5 is a method of manufacturing a display pixel with stacked subpixels, according to certain embodiments;

[12] FIG. 6A illustrates a first insulating layer of the pixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[13] FIG. 6B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the first insulating layer of FIG. 6A, according to certain embodiments;

[14] FIG. 7A illustrates a cathode layer of the first subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[15] FIG. 7B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the cathode layer of FIG. 7A, according to certain embodiments;

[16] FIG. 8A illustrates an emissive layer of the first subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[17] FIG. 8B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the emissive layer of FIG. 8A, according to certain embodiments;

[18] FIG. 9A illustrates an anode layer of the first subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[19] FIG. 9B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the anode layer of FIG. 9A, according to certain embodiments;

[20] FIG. 10A illustrates a second insulating layer of the pixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[21] FIG. 10B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the second insulating layer of FIG. 10A, according to certain embodiments;

[22] FIG. 11A illustrates a cathode layer of the second subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[23] FIG. 11B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the cathode layer of FIG. 11A, according to certain embodiments;

[24] FIG. 12A illustrates an emissive layer of the second subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[25] FIG. 12B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the emissive layer of FIG. 12A, according to certain embodiments;

[26] FIG. 13A illustrates an anode layer of the second subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[27] FIG. 13B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the anode layer of FIG. 13A, according to certain embodiments;

[28] FIG. 14A illustrates a third insulating layer of the pixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[29] FIG. 14B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the third insulating layer of FIG. 14A, according to certain embodiments;

[30] FIG. 15A illustrates a cathode layer of the third subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[31] FIG. 15B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the cathode layer of FIG. 15A, according to certain embodiments;

[32] FIG. 16A illustrates an emissive layer of the third subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[33] FIG. 16B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the emissive layer of FIG. 16A, according to certain embodiments;

[34] FIG. 17A illustrates an anode layer of the third subpixel of FIG. 1, according to certain embodiments;

[35] FIG. 17B illustrates a portion of a photomask used to manufacture the anode layer of FIG. 17A, according to certain embodiments;

[36] FIG. 18 illustrates a single sensor pixel with vertically stacked subpixels, according to certain embodiments;

[37] FIGS. 19-20 illustrate exploded views of the sensor pixel of FIG. 18, according to certain embodiments; and

[38] FIG. 21 is a method of manufacturing a sensor pixel with stacked subpixels, according to certain embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXAMPLE EMBODIMENTS

[39] Pixels are utilized in a variety of electronic displays and sensors. For example, displays used in smartphones, laptop computers, and televisions utilize arrays of pixels to display images. As another example, sensors used in cameras utilize arrays of pixels to capture images. Pixels may in some instances include subpixels of various colors. For example, some pixels may include red, blue, and green subpixels. Subpixels are typically co-planar and adjacent to

each other within a pixel. Having co-planar subpixels may be problematic in some applications, however, due to physical size requirements. For example, some electronic displays require an extremely small pixel pitch (i.e., the distance between each pixel) to provide enough resolution for visual acuity. Doing so with a high dynamic range is problematic given the lower light output due to physical size reduction of the pixels themselves and the circuitry normally surrounding them.

[40] To address these and other problems with existing pixel designs, embodiments of the disclosure provide pixels with vertically stacked subpixels that reduces the physical space required for each pixel. For example, some embodiments include three transparent overlapping red, green, and blue subpixels that are vertically stacked on top of one another. By vertically stacking the subpixels instead of locating them within the same plane, a higher number of pixels can be fit into a display or sensor area, thus providing the high pixel densities required by certain applications.

[41] In embodiments that emit light (e.g., pixels for electronic displays), light emitted from the vertically stacked subpixels is additively combined to create the full color representation. This is in contrast to existing technologies that utilize subtraction with filters and polarization to create various colors of light. In some embodiments, each individual subpixel structure includes a transparent front emissive plane and a transparent back circuitry plane. The front plane may include transparent conductive film electrodes, charge injection layers, and a tuned color-specific electroluminescent quantum dot layer. Driving circuitry for each subpixel is accomplished by a back

plane of layered transparent transistor/capacitor arrays to handle voltage switching and storage for each subpixel. Example embodiments of display pixels are illustrated in FIGURES 1-3, and a method of manufacturing display pixels is illustrated in FIGURE 5.

[42] In embodiments that sense light (e.g., pixels for sensor arrays), light entering the vertically stacked subpixels passes through to subsequent layers, with narrow bands of light captured by each subpixel layer for accurate color imaging. In some embodiments, each individual subpixel structure is an assembly of transparent layers of tuned color-specific photoelectric quantum dot films, conductive films, and semiconductor films that are patterned to create a phototransistor array. Readout from this array carries voltage from specific pixels only in response to the amount of color present in the light entering a given subpixel layer. Since each layer is tuned to detect only a particular band of light, photoelectric voltage is produced according to the percentage of that band contained within the wavelength of the incoming light. Example embodiments of sensor pixels are illustrated in FIGURES 18-20, and a method of manufacturing sensor pixels is illustrated in FIGURE 21.

[43] To facilitate a better understanding of the present disclosure, the following examples of certain embodiments are given. The following examples are not to be read to limit or define the scope of the disclosure. Embodiments of the present disclosure and its advantages are best understood by referring to FIGURES 1-21, where like numbers are used to indicate like and corresponding parts.

[44] FIGURES 1-4 illustrate various views of a single display pixel 100 with vertically stacked subpixels 110.

FIGURE 1 illustrates an assembled pixel 100, FIGURES 2-3 illustrate different exploded views of pixel 100, and FIGURE 4 illustrates an array of pixels 100. In general, these figures depict the conductive portions of the illustrated layers. Other insulating areas (e.g., outside and between the subpixel stacks) have been removed for sake of visual clarity.

[45] Display pixel 100 may be utilized in any electronic display such as a display of a smartphone, laptop computer, television, a near-eye display (e.g., a head-mounted display), a heads-up display (HUD), and the like. In general, pixel 100 includes multiple subpixels 110 that are vertically stacked on one another. For example, some embodiments of pixel 100 may include three subpixels 110: first subpixel 110A formed on a substrate (e.g., backplane driving circuitry), second subpixel 110B that is stacked on top of first subpixel 110A, and third subpixel 110C that is stacked on top of second subpixel 110B. In a particular embodiment, first subpixel 110A is a red subpixel (i.e., first subpixel 110A emits red light), second subpixel 110B is a green subpixel (i.e., second subpixel 110B emits green light), and third subpixel 110C is a blue subpixel (i.e., third subpixel 110C emits blue light). However, other embodiments may include any other order of red, green, and blue subpixels 110 (e.g., RBG, GRE, GBR, BRG, or BGR). Furthermore, some embodiments may include more or few numbers of subpixels 110 than what is illustrated in FIGURES 1-4 and may include any other appropriate colors of subpixels (e.g., yellow, amber, violet, etc.) or non-visible wavelengths.

[46] In some embodiments, pixel 100 is coupled to backplane circuitry 120 which may be formed on a substrate or backplane. In some embodiments, circuitry 120 includes layered transparent transistor/capacitor arrays to handle

voltage switching and storage for each subpixel 110. Various layers of each subpixel 110 (e.g., anode layers 220 and cathode layers 230 as described below) may be electrically coupled to circuitry 120 via connector columns 130 and connection pads 140. For example, first subpixel 110A may be coupled to circuitry 120 via connector columns 130A and 130B and connection pads 140A and 140B, second subpixel 110B may be coupled to circuitry 120 via connector columns 130C and 130D and connection pads 140C and 140D, and third subpixel 110C may be coupled to circuitry 120 via connector columns 130E and 130F and connection pads 140E and 140F, as illustrated. As a result, each subpixel 110 may be individually addressed and controlled by circuitry 120.

[47] As illustrated in detail in FIGURES 2-3, each subpixel 110 may include at least three layers: an emissive layer 210, an anode layer 220, and a cathode layer 230. For example, subpixel 110A may include at least a cathode layer 230A, an emissive layer 210A on top of cathode layer 230A, and an anode layer 220A on top of emissive layer 210A. Likewise, subpixel 110B may include at least a cathode layer 230B, an emissive layer 210B on top of cathode layer 230B, and an anode layer 220B on top of emissive layer 210B. Similarly, subpixel 110C may include at least a cathode layer 230C, an emissive layer 210C on top of cathode layer 230C, and an anode layer 220C on top of emissive layer 210C. In other embodiments, subpixels 110 may include additional layers that are not illustrated in FIGURES 2-3. For example, some embodiments of subpixels 110 may include additional insulating layers 310 that are not specifically illustrated. As a specific example, some embodiments of emissive layers 210 may include multiple

sub-layers of OLED emission architectures or electroluminescent quantum dot architectures.

[48] Anode layers 220 and cathode layers 230 are formed, respectively, from any appropriate anode or cathode material. For example, anode layers 220 and cathode layers 230 may include simple conductive polymers (or similar materials) used as transparent electrodes. In general, anode layers 220 and cathode layers 230 are transparent so that light may pass from emissive layers 210 and combine with light from subsequent subpixels 110.

[49] Emissive layers 210 generally are formed from any appropriate material capable of emitting light while supporting transparency. In some embodiments, emissive layers 210 may include both electroluminescent capabilities (e.g., a diode converting electric current into light) and photoluminescent capabilities (for down-converting incoming higher-energy light to lower-energy wavelengths). For example, emissive layers 210 may be tuned color-specific electroluminescent quantum dot (QD) layers such as quantum-dot-based light-emitting diode (QLED) layers. In some embodiments, emissive layers 210 may be organic light-emitting diode (OLED) layers. In general, emissive layers 210 may be precisely tuned for narrow band emission of specific wavelengths of light (e.g., red, green, and blue). By using electroluminescent QD emissive layers 210, certain embodiments provide 1) more efficient use of power than other methods such as liquid crystal displays (LCD), and 2) significantly higher contrast ratios than other technologies such as LCD can offer. And because each subpixel 110 is controlled directly by voltage, faster response times are possible than with technologies such as LCD. Furthermore, implementing quantum

dots which are finely tuned to emit a very narrow band of color provides purer hues and improved color gamut over both OLED and LCD technologies.

[50] In some embodiments, pixels 100 and subpixels 110 have an overall shape of a polygon when viewed from above. For example, pixels 100 and subpixels 110 may be hexagon-shaped, octagon-shaped, or the shape of any other polygon such as a triangle or quadrangle. To achieve the desired shape, each layer of subpixel 110 may be formed in the desired shape. For example, each of anode layer 220, emissive layer 210, and cathode layer 230 may be formed in the shape of the desired polygon. As a result, each side of pixel 100 may be adjacent to a side of another pixel 100 as illustrated in FIGURE 4. For example, if pixel 100 is in the shape of a hexagon, each pixel 100 in an array of pixels such as array 400 is adjacent to six other pixels 100. Furthermore, each side of each individual pixel 100 is adjacent to a side of a respective one of the six other hexagon-shaped pixels 100. In this way, the emissive area of the overall display surface is maximized since only very narrow non-conductive boundaries are patterned between each pixel. This diminishes the percentage of non-emissive "dark" areas within array 400.

[51] Embodiments of pixels 100 include multiple connector columns 130 that electrically connect the various layers of subpixels 110 to circuitry 120 via connection pads 140. For example, in some embodiments, pixel 100 includes six connector columns 130: connector column 130A that couples cathode layer 230A of subpixel 110A to circuitry 120, connector column 130B that couples anode layer 220A of subpixel 110A to circuitry 120, connector column 130C that couples cathode layer 230B of subpixel 110B to circuitry 120, connector column 130D that

couples anode layer 220B of subpixel 110B to circuitry 120, connector column 130E that couples cathode layer 230C of subpixel 110C to circuitry 120, and connector column 130F that couples anode layer 220C of subpixel 110C to circuitry 120.

[52] In general, connector columns 130 are connected only to a single layer of pixel 100 (i.e., a single anode layer 220 or cathode layer 230), thereby permitting circuitry 120 to uniquely address each anode layer 220 and cathode layer 230 of pixel 100. For example, connector column 130F is coupled only to anode layer 220C of subpixel 110C, as illustrated. Connector columns 130 are built up with one or more connector column portions 135, as illustrated in FIGURES 6A-16B. Each connector column portion 135 is an island of material that is electrically isolated from the layer on which it is formed, but permits an electrical connection between the various layers of connector column 130. Connector columns 130 are generally adjacent to a single side of pixel 100 and occupy less than half of the length of a single side of pixel 100 in order to allow enough space for a connector column 130 of an adjacent pixel 100. For example, as illustrated in FIGURE 4, connector column 130E of pixel 100A occupies one side of pixel 100 but leaves enough space for connector column 130B of pixel 100B. In addition, the connector columns 130 of a particular pixel 100 all have unique heights, in some embodiments. In the illustrated embodiment, for example, connector column 130F is the full height of pixel 100, while connector column 130E is only as tall as subpixel 110A. That is, the height of a particular connector column 130 may depend on the path of the particular connector column 130 to its connection pad 140. Connector columns 130 may be any appropriate size or shape. For example, connector columns 130 may be in the shape of a

square, rectangle, circle, triangle, trapezoid, or any other appropriate shape.

[53] Embodiments of pixel 100 may have one or more insulating layers 310, as illustrated in FIGURES 2-3. For example, some embodiments of pixel 100 may include a first insulating layer 310A between cathode layer 230A of subpixel 110A and circuitry 120, a second insulating layer 310B between cathode layer 230B of subpixel 110B and anode layer 220A of subpixel 110A, and a third insulating layer 310C between cathode layer 230C of subpixel 110C and anode layer 220B of subpixel 110B. Insulating layers 310 may be any appropriate material that electrically isolates adjacent layers of pixel 100.

[54] FIGURE 5 illustrates a method 500 of manufacturing a display pixel with stacked subpixels. For example, method 500 may be used to manufacture pixel 100 having stacked subpixels 110, as described above. Method 500, in general, utilizes steps 510-540 to create layers of a subpixel using lithography. The various layers created by these steps and the photomasks that may be utilized to create the various layers are illustrated in FIGURES 6A-17B, wherein the insulating material has been removed from the layers to allow a better view of the structure of conductive elements. As described in more detail below, steps 510-540 may be repeated one or more times to create stacked subpixels such as subpixels 110 of pixel 100. For example, steps 510-540 may be performed a total of three times to create stacked subpixels 110A-110C, as described above.

[55] Method 500 may begin in step 510 where a transparent insulating layer is created by depositing a layer of transparent insulating material and then patterning the layer

of transparent insulating material using lithography. In some embodiments, the transparent insulating layer is insulating layer 310A, which is illustrated in FIGURE 6A. In some embodiments, the layer of transparent insulating material is deposited on a substrate or backplane that includes circuitry 120, as described above. In some embodiments, the layer of transparent insulating material is patterned into the transparent insulating layer using photolithography. A portion of a photomask 600 that may be utilized by this step to pattern the layer of transparent insulating material into the transparent insulating layer is illustrated in FIGURE 6B.

[56] At step 520, a transparent cathode layer of a subpixel is created by depositing a layer of transparent conductive material on the patterned transparent insulating layer of step 510 and then patterning the transparent cathode layer using lithography such as photolithography. In some embodiments, the transparent cathode layer is cathode layer 230A, which is illustrated in FIGURE 7A. A portion of a photomask 700 that may be utilized by this step to pattern the layer of transparent conductive material into the transparent cathode layer is illustrated in FIGURE 7B. In some embodiments, patterning the transparent cathode layer includes forming a portion of the transparent cathode layer into a polygon shape, such as a hexagon or an octagon. For example, as illustrated in FIGURE 7B, the transparent cathode layer of a single subpixel may have an overall shape of a hexagon when viewed from above and may include a portion of a connector column 130 (e.g., in the shape of a rectangle or a square) coupled to one side of the hexagon shape.

[57] At step 530, an emissive layer of a subpixel is created by depositing a layer of emissive material on the

patterned transparent cathode layer of step 520 and then patterning the emissive layer using lithography such as photolithography. In some embodiments, the emissive layer is emissive layer 210A, which is illustrated in FIGURE 8A. A portion of a photomask 800 that may be utilized by this step to pattern the layer of emissive material into the emissive layer is illustrated in FIGURE 8B. In some embodiments, patterning the emissive layer includes forming a portion of the emissive layer into a polygon shape, such as a hexagon or an octagon. For example, as illustrated in FIGURE 8B, the emissive layer of a single subpixel may have an overall shape of a hexagon when viewed from above. Unlike the transparent cathode layer of step 520, the sides of the hexagon shape of the emissive layer of this step may be devoid of any portions of connector columns 130.

[58] In some embodiments, the color output of the emissive layers of step 530 are precisely tuned for narrow band emission, resulting in extremely accurate color representation. In some embodiments, high contrast ratios are achievable due to the lack of additional polarizers or filtering necessary to govern the light output of each subpixel. This results in high dynamic range image reproduction with minimal required driving voltage.

[59] At step 540, a transparent anode layer of a subpixel is created by depositing a layer of transparent anode material on the patterned emissive layer of step 530 and then patterning the transparent anode layer using lithography such as photolithography. In some embodiments, the transparent anode layer is anode layer 220A, which is illustrated in FIGURE 9A. A portion of a photomask 900 that may be utilized by this step to pattern the layer of transparent anode

material into the transparent anode layer is illustrated in FIGURE 9B. In some embodiments, patterning the transparent anode layer includes forming a portion of the transparent anode layer into a polygon shape, such as a hexagon or an octagon. For example, as illustrated in FIGURE 9B, the transparent anode layer of a single subpixel may have an overall shape of a hexagon when viewed from above and may include a portion of a connector column 130 (e.g., in the shape of a rectangle or a square) coupled to one side of the hexagon shape.

[60] At step 550, method 500 determines whether to repeat steps 510-540 based on whether additional subpixels are to be formed. Using the example embodiment of FIGURE 1, for example, method 500 would repeat steps 510-540 two additional times in order to create second subpixel 110B on top of first subpixel 110A and then third subpixel 110C on top of second subpixel 110B. To create second subpixel 110B on top of first subpixel 110A, method 500 would repeat steps 510-540 to create the various layers illustrated in FIGURES 10A, 11A, 12A, and, 13A, respectively. Portions of photomasks 1000, 1100, 1200, and 1300 that may be utilized by these steps to create second subpixel 110B are illustrated in FIGURES 10B, 11B, 12B, and, 13B, respectively. To create third subpixel 110C on top of second subpixel 110B, method 500 would repeat steps 510-540 to create the various layers illustrated in FIGURES 14A, 15A, 16A, and, 17A, respectively. Portions of photomasks 1400, 1500, 1600, and 1700 that may be utilized by these steps to create third subpixel 110C are illustrated in FIGURES 14B, 15B, 16B, and, 17B, respectively.

[61] In some embodiments, method 500 may include forming additional layers that are not specifically illustrated in

FIGURE 5. For example, additional layers such as insulating layers 310 may be formed by method 500 at any appropriate location. As another example, some embodiments may include one or more additional layers of graphene or other similar electrically-enhancing materials in order to improve efficiency and conductivity.

[62] As described above, pixels with vertically stacked subpixels may be utilized as either display or sensor pixels. The previous figures illustrated embodiments of display pixels 100 that include emissive layers 210. The following FIGURES 18-20, however, illustrate embodiments of sensor pixels 1800 with vertically stacked subpixels 110 that include photodetector layers 1910 in place of emissive layers 210. FIGURE 18 illustrates an assembled sensor pixel 1800 and FIGURES 19-20 illustrate different exploded views of sensor pixel 1800. In general, these figures depict the conductive portions of the illustrated layers. Other insulating areas (e.g., outside and between the subpixel stacks) have been removed for sake of visual clarity.

[63] Sensor pixel 1800 may be utilized in any electronic devices such as cameras that are used to sense or capture light (e.g., photos and videos). Like display pixel 100, sensor pixel 1800 includes multiple subpixels 110 that are vertically stacked on top of one another. For example, some embodiments of pixel 1800 may include three subpixels 110: first subpixel 110A, second subpixel 110B that is stacked on top of first subpixel 110A, and third subpixel 110C that is stacked on top of second subpixel 110B. In a particular embodiment, first subpixel 110A is a red subpixel (i.e., first subpixel 110A detects red light), second subpixel 110B is a green subpixel (i.e., second subpixel 110B detects green

light), and third subpixel 110C is a blue subpixel (i.e., third subpixel 110C detects blue light). However, other embodiments may include any other order of red, green, and blue subpixels 110. Furthermore, some embodiments may include more or few numbers of subpixels 110 than what is illustrated in FIGURES 18-20 and may include any other appropriate colors of subpixels (e.g., violet, etc.).

[64] Like display pixel 100, sensor pixel 1800 may be coupled to backplane circuitry 120. In some embodiments, circuitry 120 includes layered transparent transistor/capacitor arrays to handle voltage switching and storage for each subpixel 110 of pixel 1800. Various layers of each subpixel 110 (e.g., anode layers 220 and cathode layers 230 as described above) may be electrically coupled to circuitry 120 via connector columns 130 and connection pads 140. For example, first subpixel 110A may be coupled to circuitry 120 via connector columns 130A and 130B and connection pads 140A and 140B, second subpixel 110B may be coupled to circuitry 120 via connector columns 130C and 130D and connection pads 140C and 140D, and third subpixel 110C may be coupled to circuitry 120 via connector columns 130E and 130F and connection pads 140E and 140F, as illustrated. As a result, each subpixel 110 may be individually addressed and controlled by circuitry 120.

[65] As illustrated in detail in FIGURES 19-20, each subpixel 110 of sensor pixel 1800 may include at least three layers: a photodetector layer 1910, an anode layer 220, and a cathode layer 230. For example, subpixel 110A may include at least a cathode layer 230A, a photodetector layer 1910A on top of cathode layer 230A, and an anode layer 220A on top of photodetector layer 1910A. Likewise, subpixel 110B may

include at least a cathode layer 230B, a photodetector layer 1910B on top of cathode layer 230B, and an anode layer 220B on top of photodetector layer 1910B. Similarly, subpixel 110C may include at least a cathode layer 230C, a photodetector layer 1910C on top of cathode layer 230C, and an anode layer 220C on top of photodetector layer 1910C. In other embodiments, subpixels 110 may include additional layers that are not illustrated in FIGURES 18-20. For example, some embodiments of subpixels 110 may include additional insulating layers 310 that are not specifically illustrated. As another example, some embodiments may include one or more additional layers of graphene or other similar electrically-enhancing materials in order to improve efficiency and conductivity.

[66] As discussed above with respect to FIGURES 2-3, anode layers 220 and cathode layers 230 are formed, respectively, from any appropriate anode or cathode material. In general, anode layers 220 and cathode layers 230 are transparent so that light may pass through them and into photodetector layers 1910. Only narrow bands of light are captured by each photodetector layer 1910 for accurate color imaging.

[67] Photodetector layers 1910 generally are formed from any appropriate material capable of detecting light while supporting transparency. For example, photodetector layers 1910 may be tuned color-specific electroluminescent QD layers such as QLED layers. In some embodiments, photodetector layers 1910 may be OLED layers. In some embodiments, photodetector layers 1910 may be precisely tuned for narrow band detection of specific wavelengths of light (e.g., red, green, and blue). By using electroluminescent QD photodetector layers 1910, certain embodiments provide 1)

improved color gamut in the resulting imagery since precisely-tuned photoelectric quantum dot films are used to capture only the band of light necessary for a given subpixel, and 2) greatly improved shutter speeds over traditional CMOS image sensors due to very fast response times of quantum dot photoelectric materials.

[68] In some embodiments, photodetector layers 1910 utilize any transparent photodetector material in combination with unique color filtering instead of QD photodetectors. For example, as depicted in FIGURE 19, full spectrum light may first enter sensor pixel 1800 from the top (i.e., through third subpixel 110C). Third subpixel 110C may include a specific color filter as an additional "sub-layer" (e.g., within photodetector layer 1910) to allow only certain wavelengths of light to pass through. Second subpixel 110B may include a color filter of a different specific color to allow only other certain wavelengths of light to pass through to first subpixel 110A beneath it. By mathematically subtracting the readout signals from each of these subpixels 110, sensor pixel 1800 may be able to isolate specific colors from the upper two subpixels (e.g., 110C and 110B), thus outputting a full RGB signal.

[69] In some embodiments, sensor pixels 1800 and subpixels 110 have an overall shape of a polygon when viewed from above. For example, pixels 1800 and subpixels 110 may be hexagon-shaped, octagon-shaped, or the shape of any other polygon. To achieve the desired shape, each layer of subpixel 110 may be formed in the desired shape. For example, each of anode layer 220, photodetector layer 1910, and cathode layer 230 may be formed in the shape of the desired polygon. As a result, each side of pixel 1800 may be adjacent to a side of

another pixel 1800, similar to pixels 100 as illustrated in FIGURE 4. For example, if pixel 1800 is in the shape of a hexagon, each pixel 1800 in an array of pixels such as array 400 is adjacent to six other pixels 1800. Furthermore, each side of each individual pixel 1800 is adjacent to a side of a respective one of the six other hexagon-shaped pixels 1800. In this way, the sensitive area of the overall display surface is maximized since only very narrow non-conductive boundaries are patterned between each pixel. This diminishes the percentage of non-emissive "dark" areas within an array of pixels 1800.

[70] Like display pixels 100, embodiments of sensor pixels 1800 include multiple connector columns 130 that electrically connect the various layers of subpixels 110 to circuitry 120 via connection pads 140. For example, in some embodiments, pixel 1800 includes six connector columns 130: connector column 130A that couples cathode layer 230A of subpixel 110A to circuitry 120, connector column 130B that couples anode layer 220A of subpixel 110A to circuitry 120, connector column 130C that couples cathode layer 230B of subpixel 110B to circuitry 120, connector column 130D that couples anode layer 220B of subpixel 110B to circuitry 120, connector column 130E that couples cathode layer 230C of subpixel 110C to circuitry 120, and connector column 130F that couples anode layer 220C of subpixel 110C to circuitry 120.

[71] FIGURE 21 illustrates a method 2100 of manufacturing a sensor pixel with stacked subpixels. For example, method 2100 may be used to manufacture pixel 1800 having stacked subpixels 110, as described above. Method 2100, in general, utilizes steps 2110-2140 to create layers of a subpixel using lithography. The various layers created by these steps and

the photomasks that may be utilized to create the various layers are illustrated in FIGURES 6A-17B, except that emissive layers 210 are replaced by photodetector layers 1910. As described in more detail below, steps 2110-2140 may be repeated one or more times to create stacked subpixels such as subpixels 110 of pixel 1800. For example, steps 2110-2140 may be performed a total of three times to create stacked subpixels 110A-110C, as described above.

[72] Method 2100 may begin in step 2110 where a transparent insulating layer is created by depositing a layer of transparent insulating material and then patterning the layer of transparent insulating material using lithography. In some embodiments, the transparent insulating layer is insulating layer 310A, which is illustrated in FIGURE 6A. In some embodiments, the layer of transparent insulating material is deposited on a substrate or backplane that includes circuitry 120, as described above. In some embodiments, the layer of transparent insulating material is patterned into the transparent insulating layer using photolithography. A portion of a photomask 600 that may be utilized by this step to pattern the layer of transparent insulating material into the transparent insulating layer is illustrated in FIGURE 6B.

[73] At step 2120, a transparent cathode layer of a subpixel is created by depositing a layer of transparent conductive material on the patterned transparent insulating layer of step 2110 and then patterning the transparent cathode layer using lithography such as photolithography. In some embodiments, the transparent cathode layer is cathode layer 230A, which is illustrated in FIGURE 7A. A portion of a photomask 700 that may be utilized by this step to pattern the layer of transparent conductive material into the transparent

cathode layer is illustrated in FIGURE 7B. In some embodiments, patterning the transparent cathode layer includes forming a portion of the transparent cathode layer into a polygon shape, such as a hexagon or an octagon. For example, as illustrated in FIGURE 7B, the transparent cathode layer of a single subpixel may have an overall shape of a hexagon when viewed from above and may include a portion of a connector column 130 (e.g., in the shape of a rectangle or a square) coupled to one side of the hexagon shape.

[74] At step 2130, a photodetector layer of a subpixel is created by depositing a layer of photodetector material on the patterned transparent cathode layer of step 2120 and then patterning the photodetector layer using lithography such as photolithography. In some embodiments, the photodetector layer is photodetector layer 1910A, which is illustrated in FIGURE 8A (except that emissive layer 210A is replaced by photodetector layer 1910A). A portion of a photomask 800 that may be utilized by this step to pattern the layer of photodetector material into the photodetector layer is illustrated in FIGURE 8B. In some embodiments, patterning the photodetector layer includes forming a portion of the photodetector layer into a polygon shape, such as a hexagon or an octagon. For example, as illustrated in FIGURE 8B, the photodetector layer of a single subpixel may have an overall shape of a hexagon when viewed from above. Unlike the transparent cathode layer of step 2120, the sides of the hexagon shape of the photodetector layer of this step may be devoid of any portions of connector columns 130.

[75] At step 2140, a transparent anode layer of a subpixel is created by depositing a layer of transparent anode material on the patterned photodetector layer of step 2130 and

then patterning the transparent anode layer using lithography such as photolithography. In some embodiments, the transparent anode layer is anode layer 220A, which is illustrated in FIGURE 9A. A portion of a photomask 900 that may be utilized by this step to pattern the layer of transparent anode material into the transparent anode layer is illustrated in FIGURE 9B. In some embodiments, patterning the transparent anode layer includes forming a portion of the transparent anode layer into a polygon shape, such as a hexagon or an octagon. For example, as illustrated in FIGURE 9B, the transparent anode layer of a single subpixel may have an overall shape of a hexagon when viewed from above and may include a portion of a connector column 130 (e.g., in the shape of a rectangle or a square) coupled to one side of the hexagon shape.

[76] At step 2150, method 2100 determines whether to repeat steps 2110-2140 based on whether additional subpixels are to be formed for pixel 1800. Using the example embodiment of FIGURE 18, for example, method 2100 would repeat steps 2110-2140 two additional times in order to create second subpixel 110B on top of first subpixel 110A and then third subpixel 110C on top of second subpixel 110B. To create second subpixel 110B on top of first subpixel 110A, method 2100 would repeat steps 2110-2140 to create the various layers illustrated in FIGURES 10A, 11A, 12A, and, 13A, respectively. Portions of photomasks 1000, 1100, 1200, and 1300 that may be utilized by these steps to create second subpixel 110B are illustrated in FIGURES 10B, 11B, 12B, and, 13B, respectively. To create third subpixel 110C on top of second subpixel 110B, method 2100 would repeat steps 2110-2140 to create the various layers illustrated in FIGURES 14A, 121A, 16A, and, 17A,

respectively. Portions of photomasks 1400, 12100, 1600, and 1700 that may be utilized by these steps to create third subpixel 110C are illustrated in FIGURES 14B, 121B, 16B, and, 17B, respectively.

[77] In some embodiments, method 2100 may include forming additional layers that are not specifically illustrated in FIGURE 21. For example, additional layers such as insulating layers 310 may be formed by method 2100 at any appropriate location. Furthermore, as previously noted, some steps of some embodiments of method 210 may include additional steps that are not specifically mentioned. For example, some layers (e.g., some insulating layers) may be a combination of both insulating and conductive films. Such layers may be manufactured using standard planar semiconductor techniques: depositing, masking, etching, and repeating as many times as necessary to produce the required pattern of conductive and non-conductive areas within the layer.

[78] Herein, "or" is inclusive and not exclusive, unless expressly indicated otherwise or indicated otherwise by context. Therefore, herein, "A or B" means "A, B, or both," unless expressly indicated otherwise or indicated otherwise by context. Moreover, "and" is both joint and several, unless expressly indicated otherwise or indicated otherwise by context. Therefore, herein, "A and B" means "A and B, jointly or severally," unless expressly indicated otherwise or indicated otherwise by context.

[79] Herein, the phrase "on top" when used to describe subpixels 110 and their various layers (e.g., layers 210, 220, and 230) refers to a viewing direction for display pixels 100 and a light entry direction for sensor pixels 1800. As an example, subpixel 110B of display pixel 100 is described as

being stacked "on top" of subpixel 110A. As illustrated in FIGURES 2-3, "on top" means that subpixel 110B is on the side of subpixel 110A that is towards the location that the combined light that is emitted from display pixel 100 may be viewed. Stated another way, subpixel 110B is on the opposite side of subpixel 110A from circuitry 120. As another example, subpixel 110C of sensor pixel 1800 is described as being stacked "on top" of subpixel 110B. As illustrated in FIGURES 19-20, "on top" means that subpixel 110C is on the side of subpixel 110B that is towards the location that the full spectrum light enters sensor pixel 1800.

[80] The scope of this disclosure encompasses all changes, substitutions, variations, alterations, and modifications to the example embodiments described or illustrated herein that a person having ordinary skill in the art would comprehend. The scope of this disclosure is not limited to the example embodiments described or illustrated herein. Moreover, although this disclosure describes and illustrates respective embodiments herein as including particular components, elements, functions, operations, or steps, any of these embodiments may include any combination or permutation of any of the components, elements, functions, operations, or steps described or illustrated anywhere herein that a person having ordinary skill in the art would comprehend. Furthermore, reference in the appended claims to an apparatus or system or a component of an apparatus or system being adapted to, arranged to, capable of, configured to, enabled to, operable to, or operative to perform a particular function encompasses that apparatus, system, component, whether or not it or that particular function is activated, turned on, or unlocked, as long as that apparatus,

system, or component is so adapted, arranged, capable, configured, enabled, operable, or operative.

[81] Although this disclosure describes and illustrates respective embodiments herein as including particular components, elements, functions, operations, or steps, any of these embodiments may include any combination or permutation of any of the components, elements, functions, operations, or steps described or illustrated anywhere herein that a person having ordinary skill in the art would comprehend.

[82] Furthermore, reference in the appended claims to an apparatus or system or a component of an apparatus or system being adapted to, arranged to, capable of, configured to, enabled to, operable to, or operative to perform a particular function encompasses that apparatus, system, component, whether or not it or that particular function is activated, turned on, or unlocked, as long as that apparatus, system, or component is so adapted, arranged, capable, configured, enabled, operable, or operative.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system comprising:
 - a substrate;
 - a plurality of hexagon-shaped pixels coupled to the substrate, each hexagon-shaped pixel comprising:
 - a first subpixel formed on the substrate;
 - a second subpixel stacked on top of the first subpixel; and
 - a third subpixel stacked on top of the second subpixel; and
 - a plurality of connector columns that electrically couple the first, second, and third subpixels to the substrate;
 - wherein:
 - each of the first, second, and third subpixels comprises a photodetector layer located between a transparent cathode layer and a transparent anode layer;
 - and
 - each transparent cathode layer and transparent anode layer of each subpixel is electrically coupled to the substrate through a respective one of the plurality of connector columns.
2. The system of Claim 1, wherein each connector column of each particular hexagon-shaped pixel is adjacent to a respective side of the particular hexagon-shaped pixel.

3. The system of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of hexagon-shaped pixels comprises a first pixel that is adjacent to six other hexagon-shaped pixels, each side of the first pixel being adjacent to a side of a respective one of the six other hexagon-shaped pixels.

4. The system of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of connector columns are in the shape of a square, a rectangle, a circle, a triangle, or a trapezoid.

5. The system of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of connector columns comprise six connector columns, wherein each of the six connector columns has a different height from the remaining connector columns of the six connector columns.

6. The system of Claim 1, wherein each photodetector layer comprises:

- a quantum dot layer;
- an organic light-emitting diode (OLED) layer;
- a quantum-dot-based light-emitting diode (QLED) layer; or
- a transparent photodetector material and a color filter.

7. The system of Claim 1, wherein the photodetector layers of the first, second, and third subpixels are configured to detect a respective color selected from the group consisting of red, blue, and green.

8. A pixel for an image sensor, the pixel comprising:
a first subpixel; and
a second subpixel stacked on top of the first subpixel;
wherein:

each of the first and second subpixels comprises a
polygon shape; and

each of the first and second subpixels comprises a
photodetector layer, a transparent cathode layer, and a
transparent anode layer.

9. The pixel of Claim 8, wherein the polygon shape
comprises a hexagon, an octagon, a triangle, or a quadrangle.

10. The pixel of Claim 8, further comprising a plurality
of connector columns that electrically couple the first and
second subpixels to a substrate, wherein each connector column
is adjacent to a respective side of the polygon shape of the
first and second subpixels.

11. The pixel of Claim 10, wherein the plurality of
connector columns are in the shape of a square, a rectangle,
or a circle.

12. The pixel of Claim 10, wherein the plurality of connector columns comprise four connector columns and the polygon shape comprises a hexagon, wherein each of the four connector columns has a different height from the remaining connector columns of the four connector columns.

13. The pixel of Claim 8, wherein each photodetector layer comprises:

- a quantum dot layer;
- an organic light-emitting diode (OLED) layer;
- a quantum-dot-based light-emitting diode (QLED) layer; or
- a transparent photodetector material and a color filter.

14. The pixel of Claim 8, wherein:

- the photodetector layer of each particular subpixel is on top of the transparent cathode layer of the particular subpixel; and

- the transparent anode layer of each particular subpixel is on top of the photodetector layer of the particular subpixel.

15. The pixel of Claim 8, wherein the pixel is devoid of any polarizing and filtering layers.

16. A method of manufacturing a pixel for an image sensor, the method comprising:

creating a first subpixel by:

performing a first step of creating a transparent insulating layer by depositing a layer of transparent insulating material and then patterning the layer of transparent insulating material using lithography;

performing a second step of creating a transparent cathode layer of a subpixel by depositing a layer of transparent conductive material on the patterned transparent insulating layer and then patterning the transparent cathode layer using lithography, wherein patterning the transparent cathode layer comprises forming a portion of the transparent cathode layer into a polygon shape;

performing a third step of creating a photodetector layer of the subpixel by depositing a layer of photodetecting material on the patterned transparent cathode layer and then patterning the photodetector layer using lithography, wherein patterning the photodetector layer comprises forming a portion of the photodetector layer into the polygon shape; and

performing a fourth step of creating a transparent anode layer of the subpixel by depositing a layer of transparent anode material on the patterned photodetector layer and then patterning the transparent anode layer using lithography, wherein patterning the transparent anode layer comprises forming a portion of the transparent anode layer into the polygon shape; and

creating a second subpixel on top of the first subpixel by repeating the first, second, third, and fourth steps.

17. The method of manufacturing the pixel for the image sensor of Claim 16, wherein the lithography comprises photolithography.

18. The method of manufacturing the pixel for the image sensor of Claim 16, wherein the polygon shape comprises a hexagon, an octagon, a triangle, or a quadrangle.

19. The method of manufacturing the pixel for the image sensor of Claim 16, wherein the photodetecting material of the third step comprises:

- a quantum dot material;
- an organic light-emitting diode (OLED) material;
- a quantum-dot-based light-emitting diode (QLED) material;

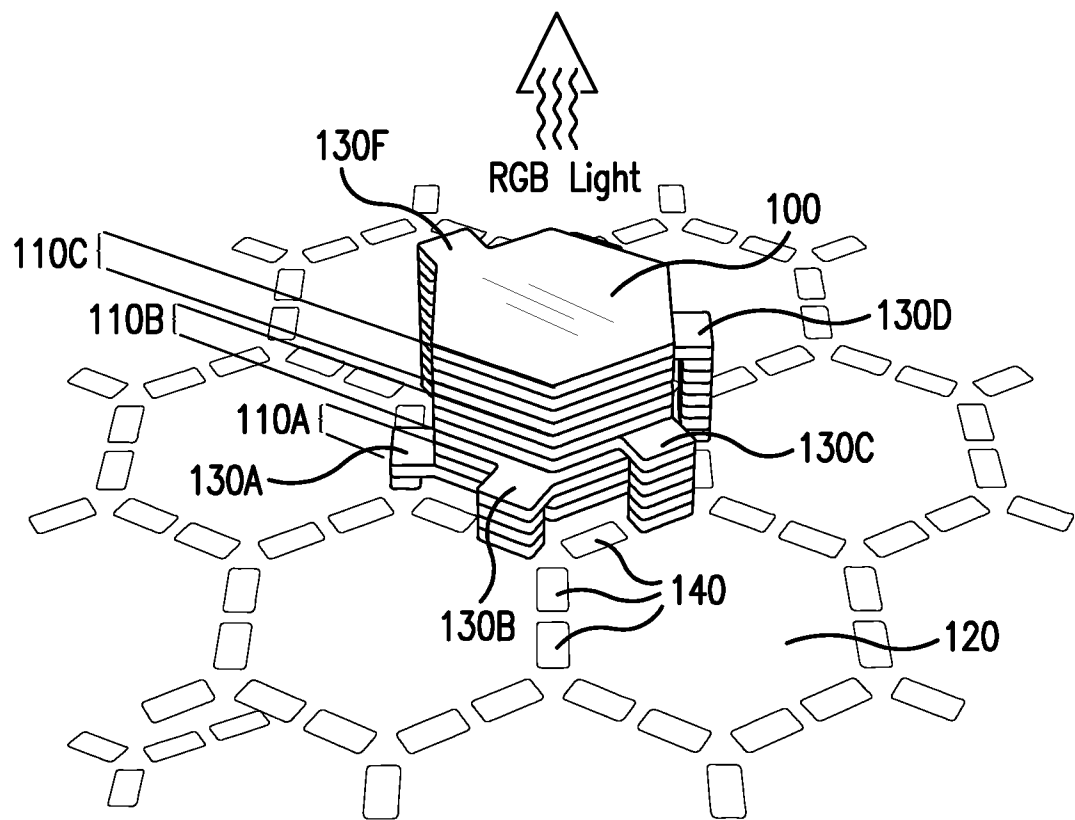
or

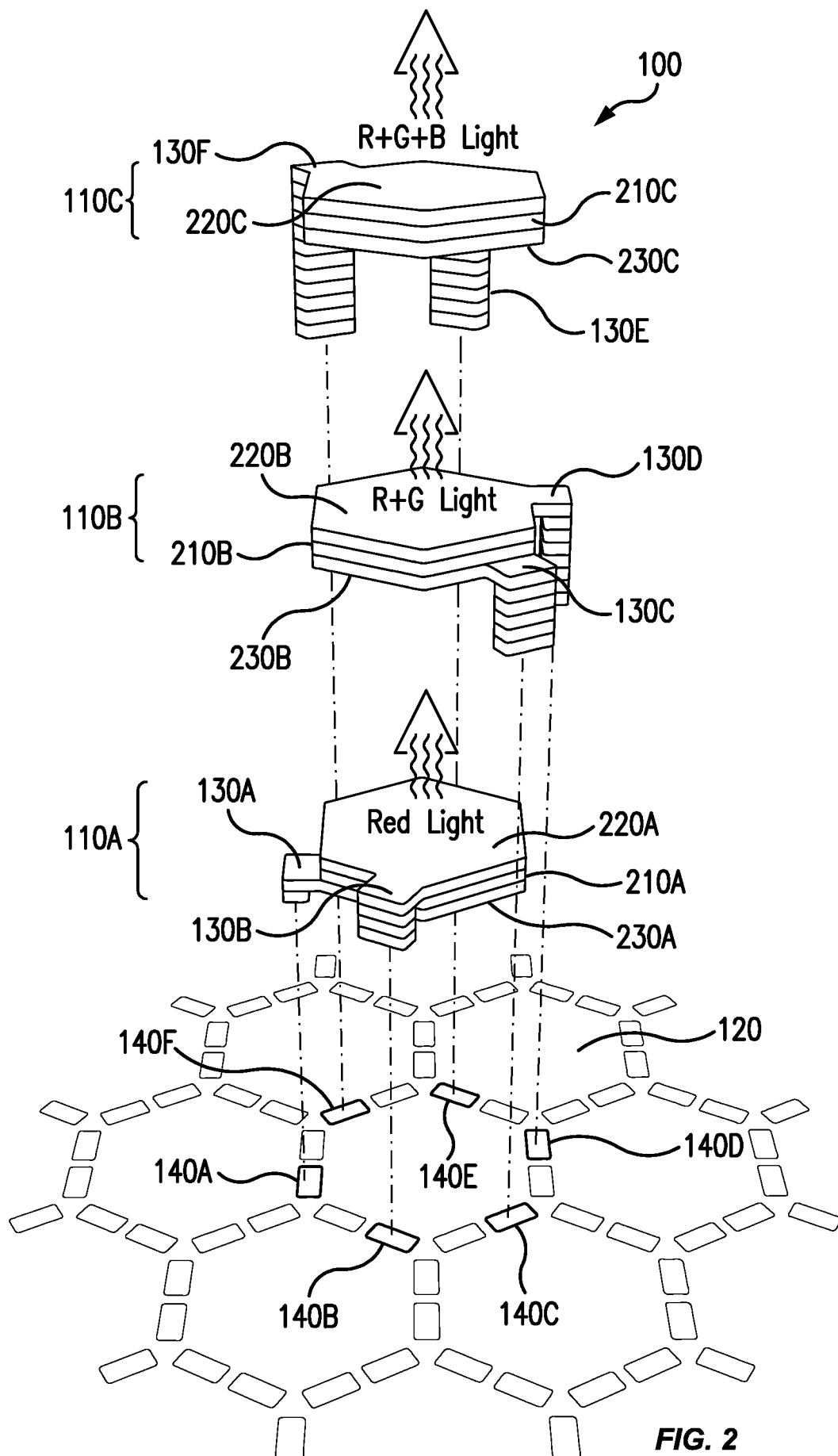
- a transparent photodetector material and a color filter.

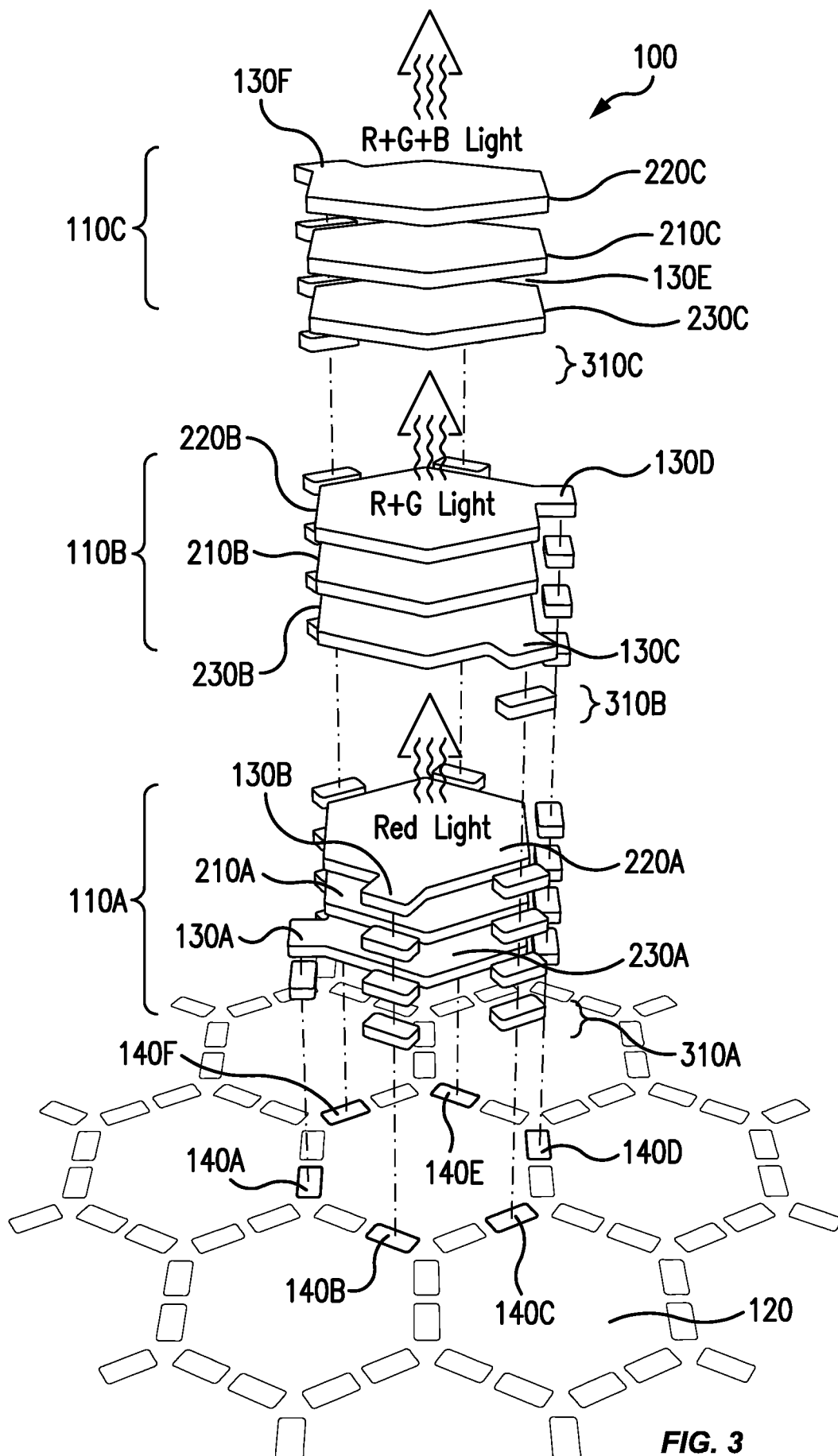
20. The method of manufacturing the pixel for the image sensor of Claim 16, wherein:

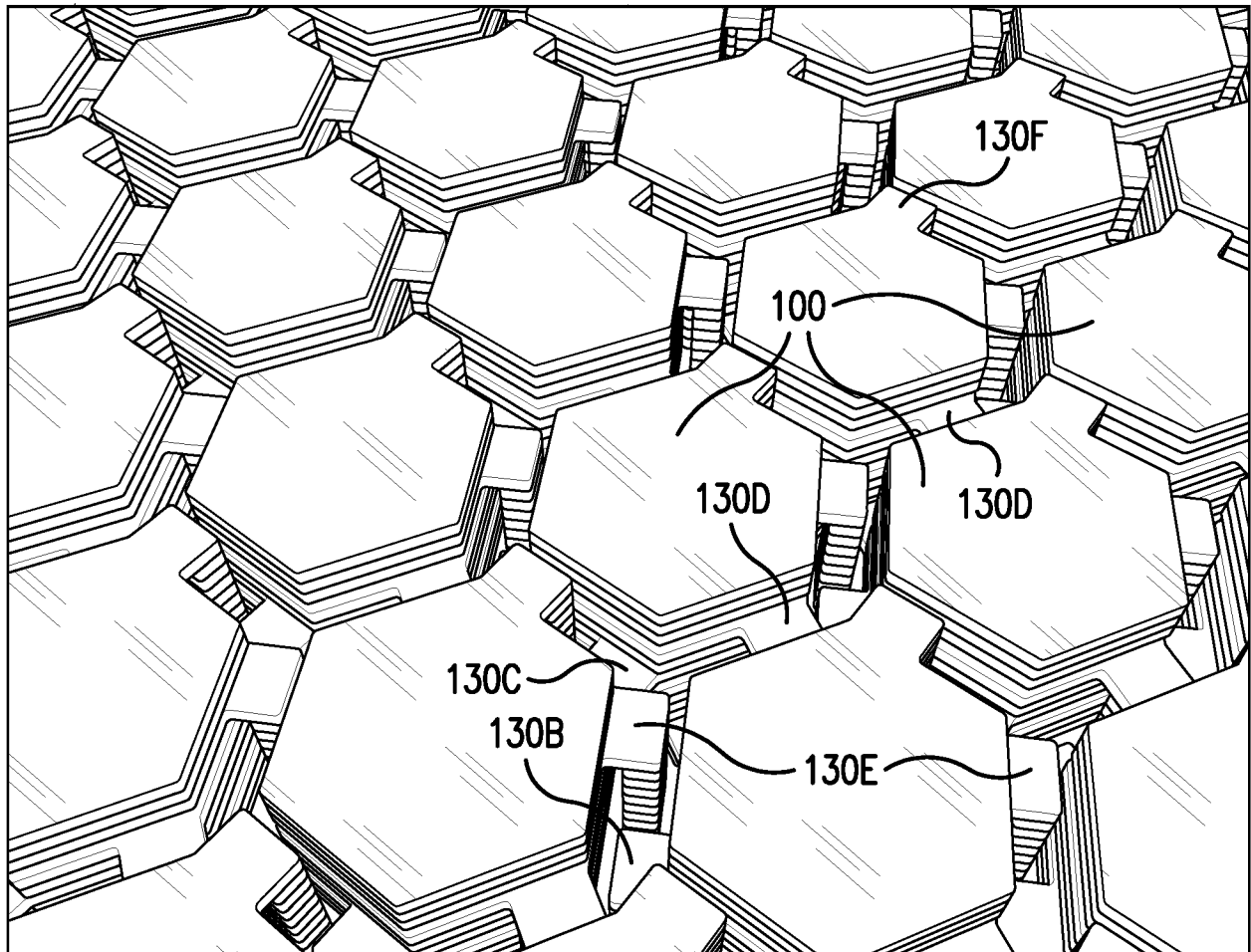
- patterning the transparent cathode layer of the second step further comprises forming a portion of a first connection column on at least one side of the polygon shape of the transparent cathode layer; and

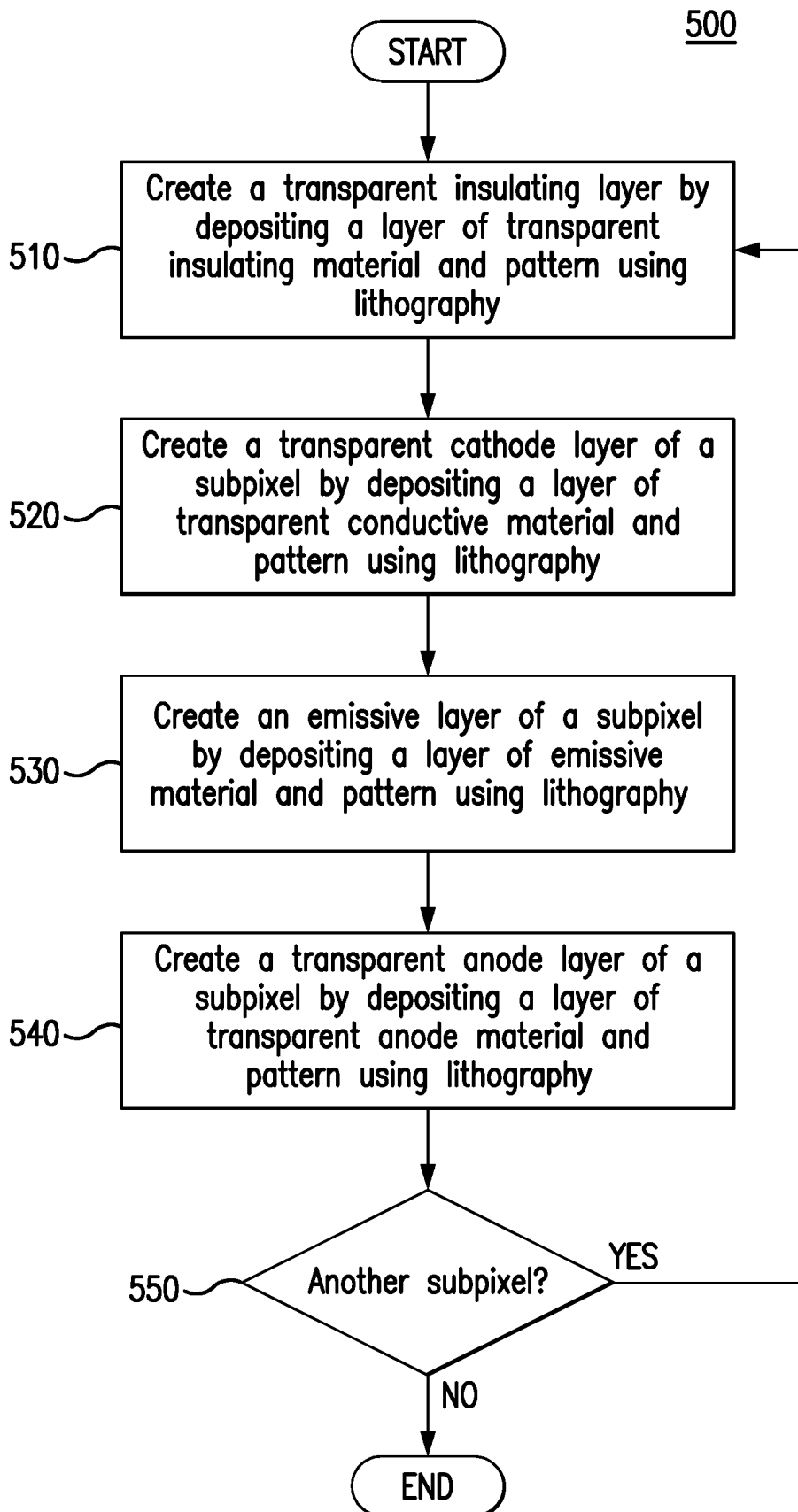
- patterning the transparent anode layer of the fourth step further comprises forming a portion of a second connection column on at least one side of the polygon shape of the transparent anode layer.

**FIG. 1**





**FIG. 4**

**FIG. 5**

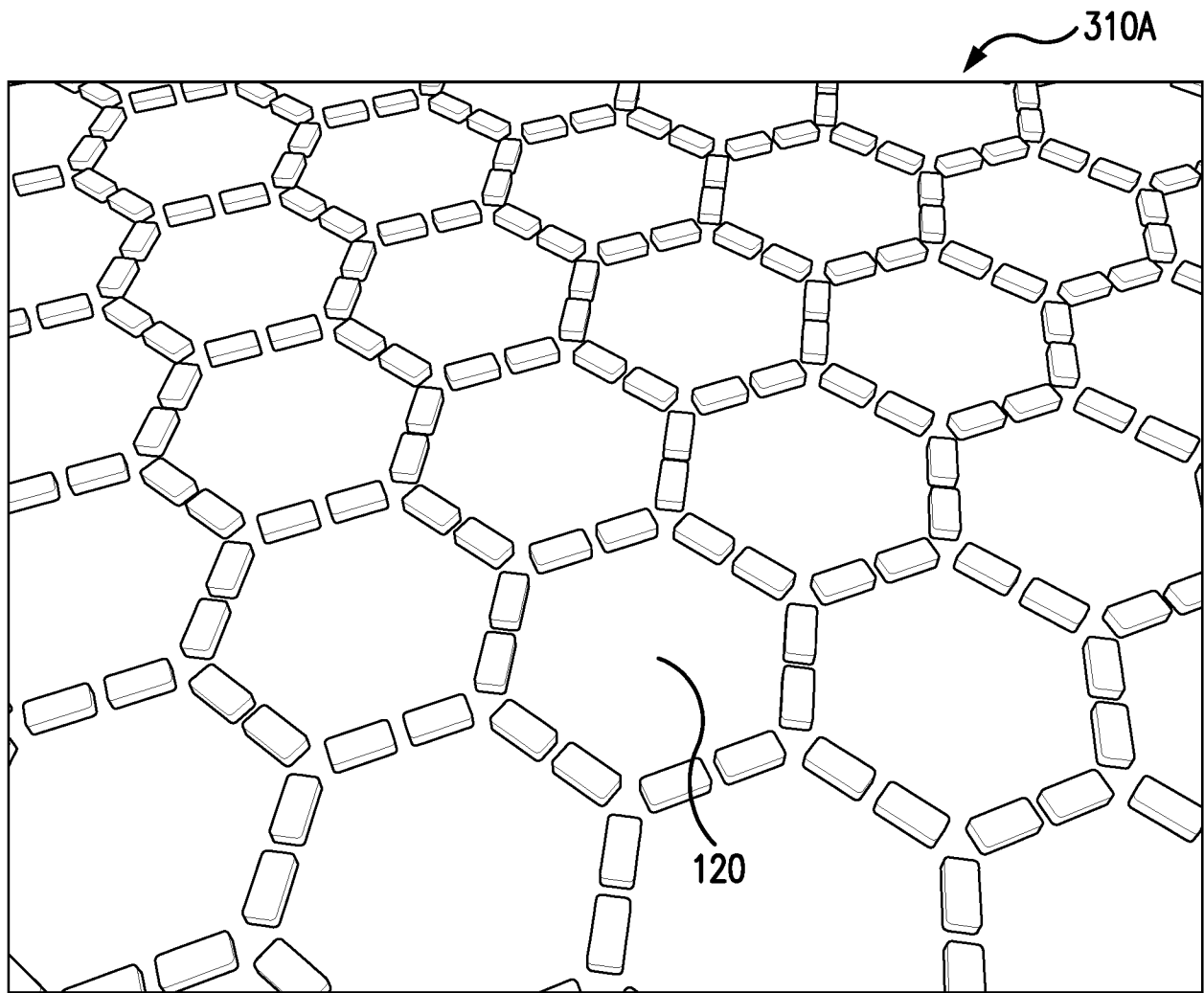


FIG. 6A

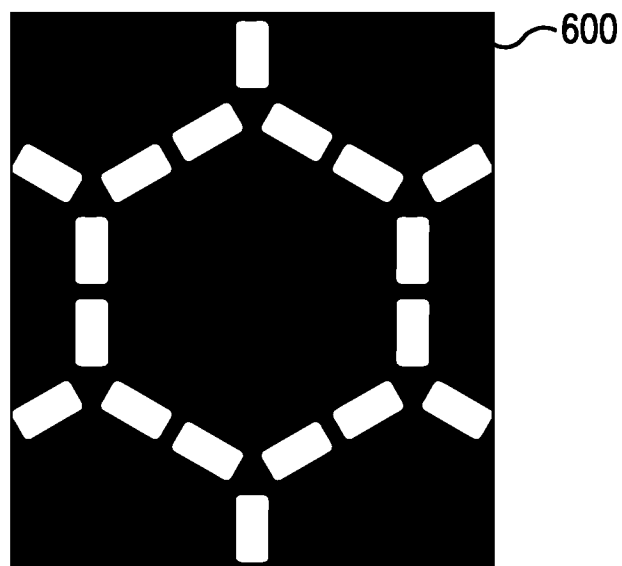


FIG. 6B

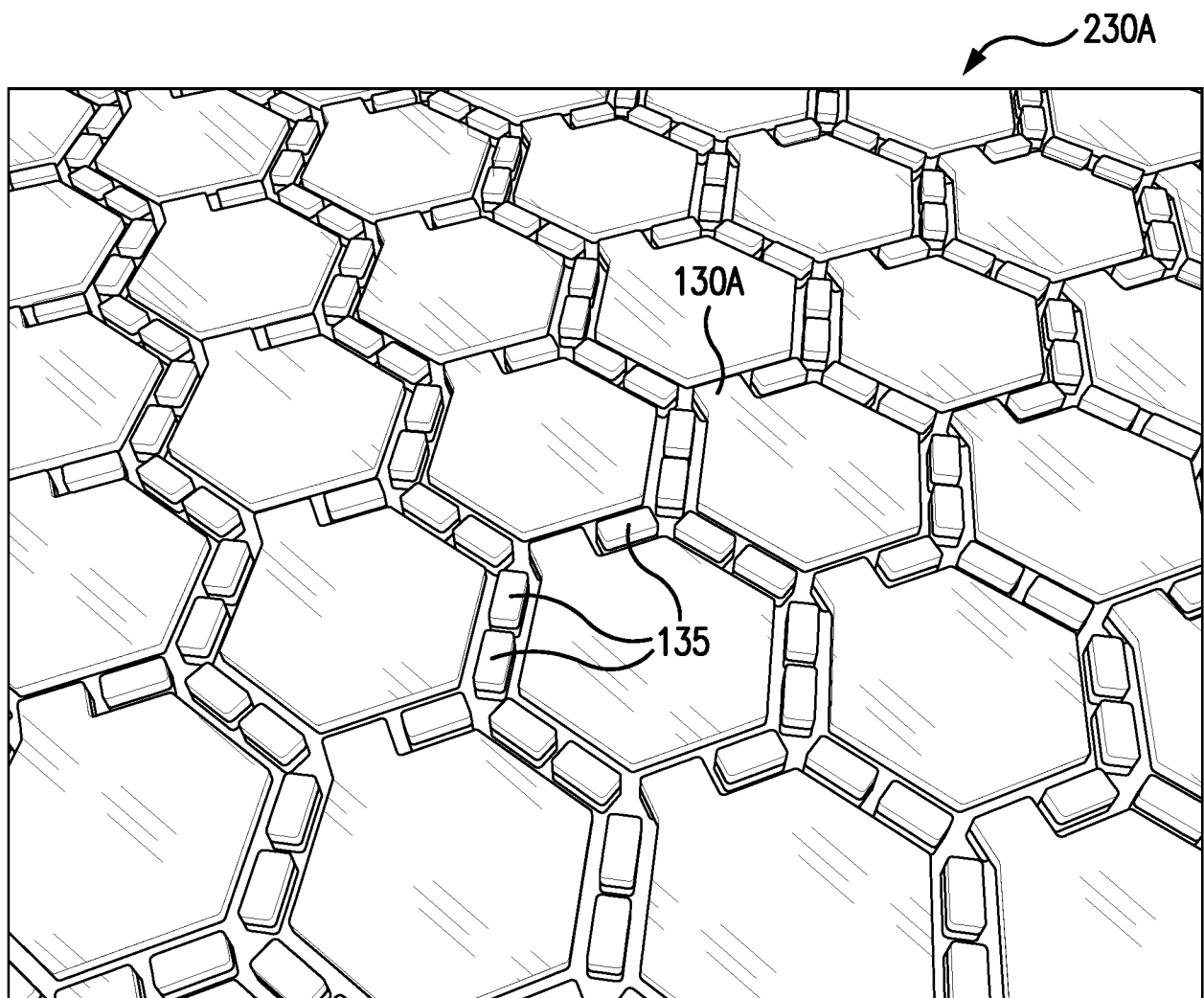


FIG. 7A

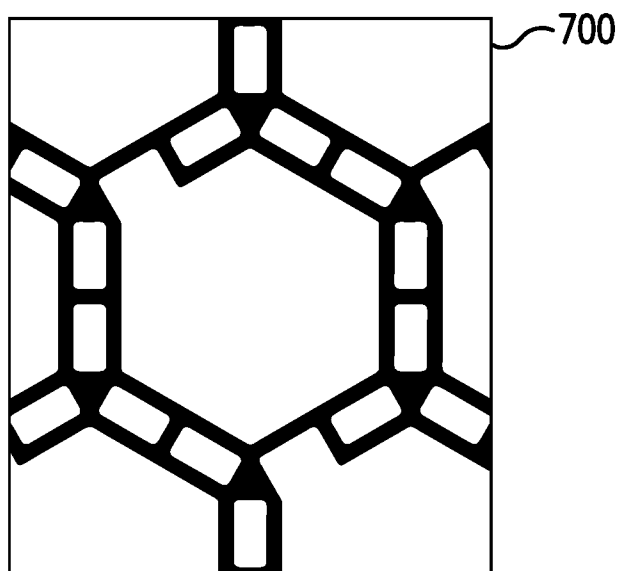


FIG. 7B

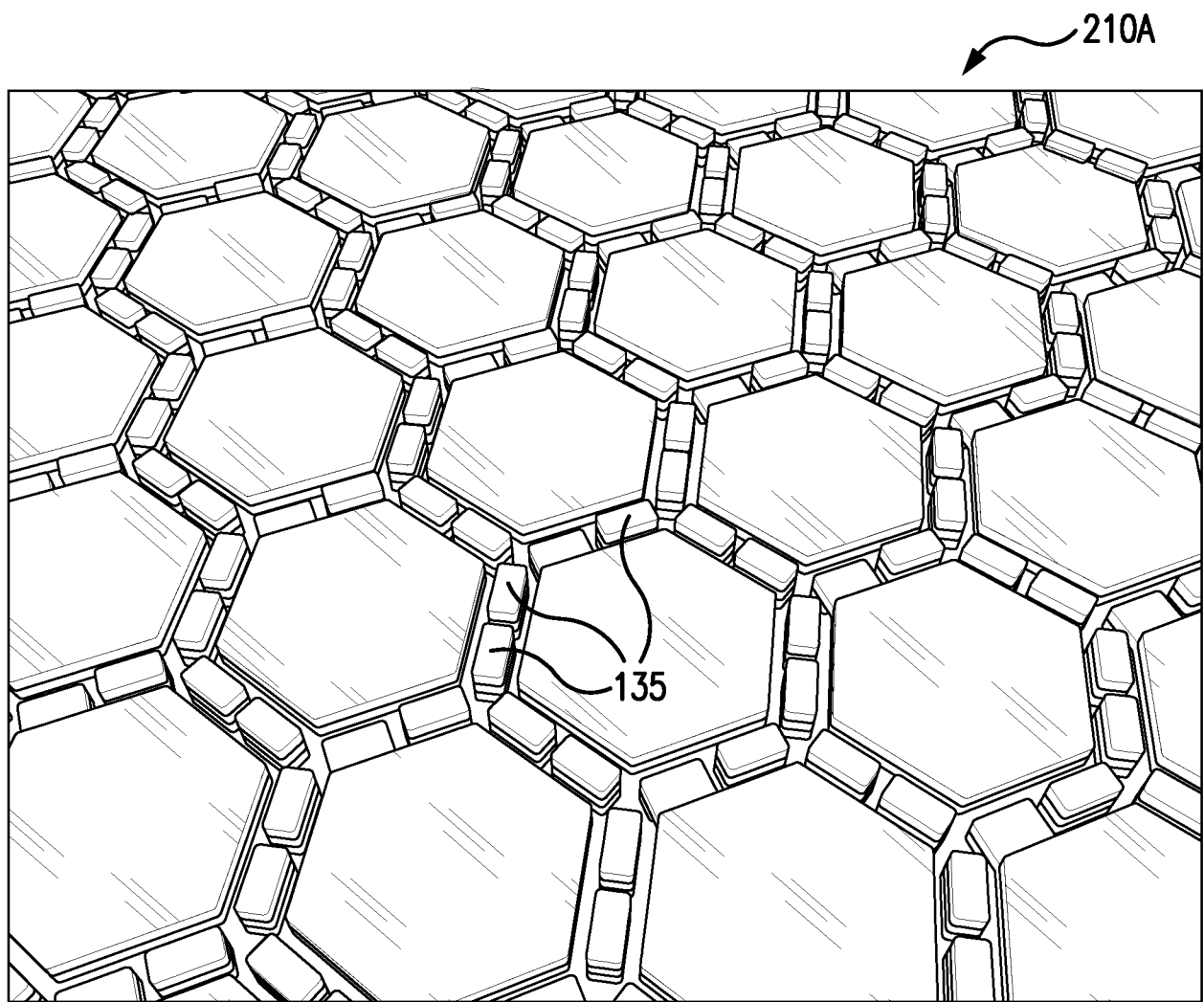


FIG. 8A

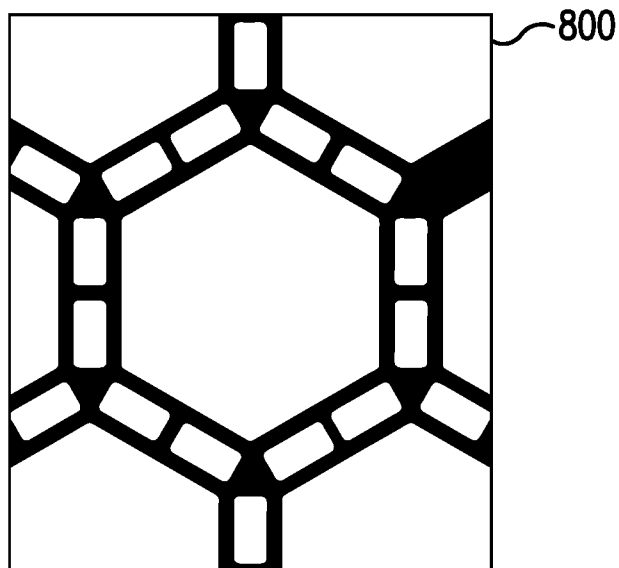


FIG. 8B

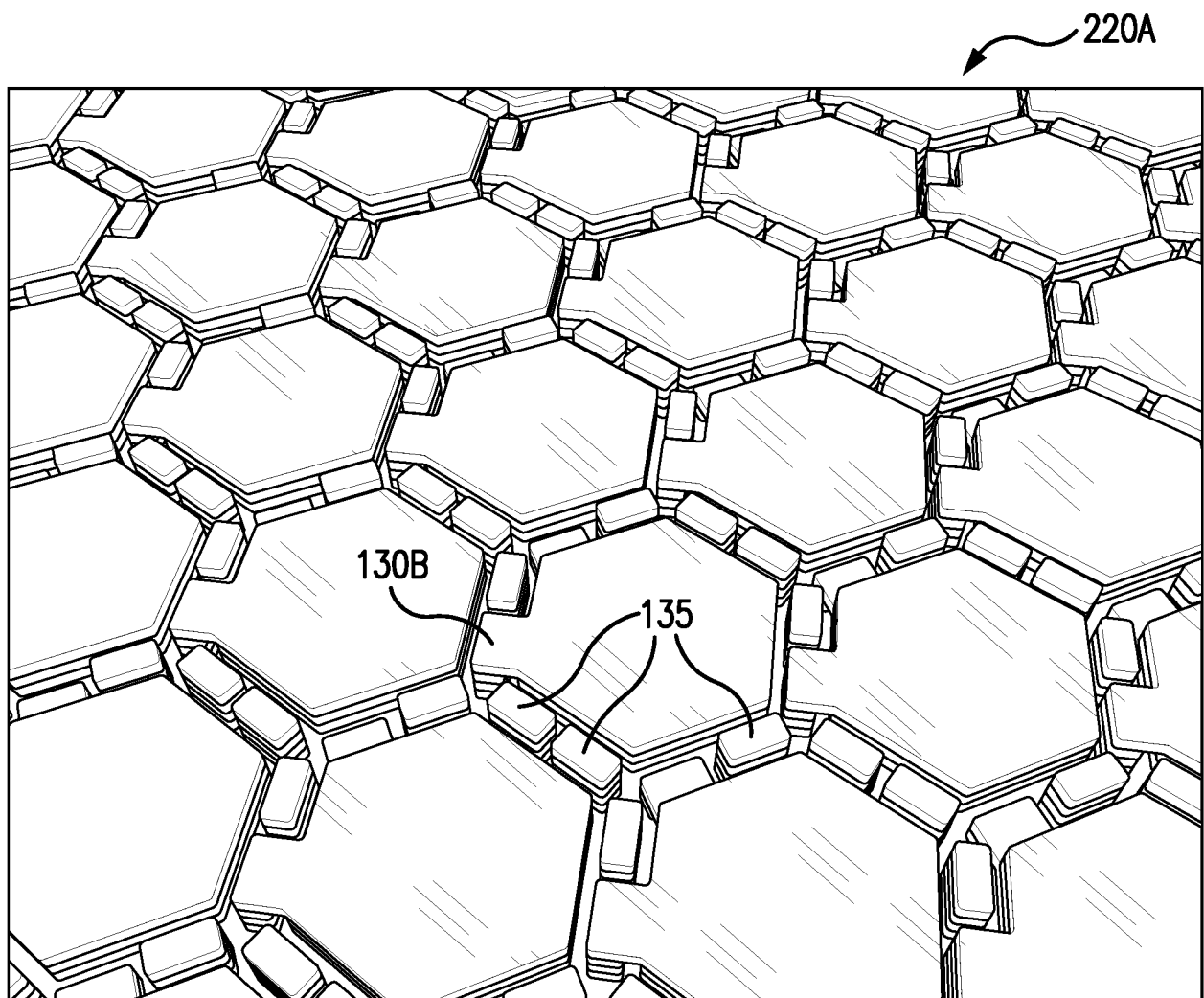


FIG. 9A

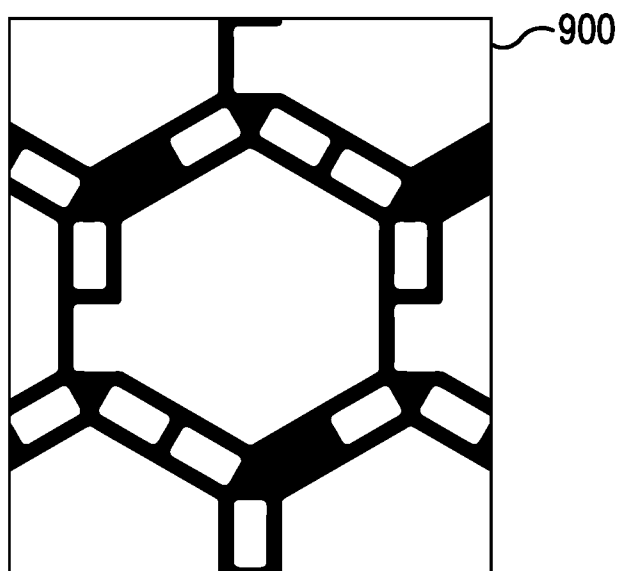


FIG. 9B

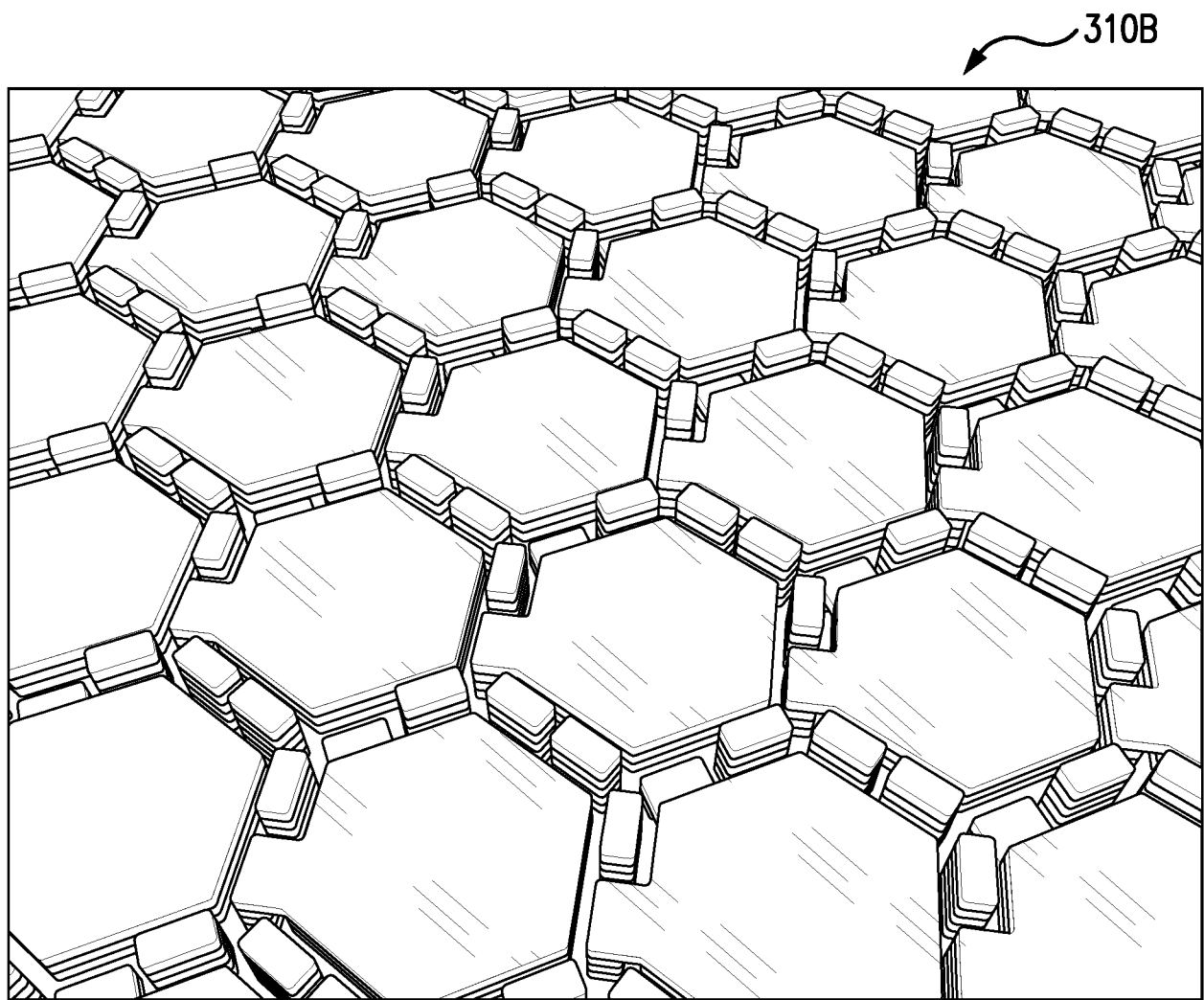


FIG. 10A

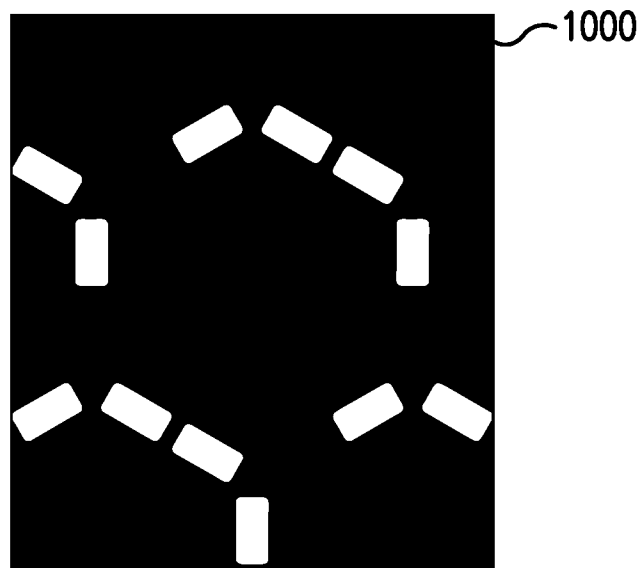


FIG. 10B

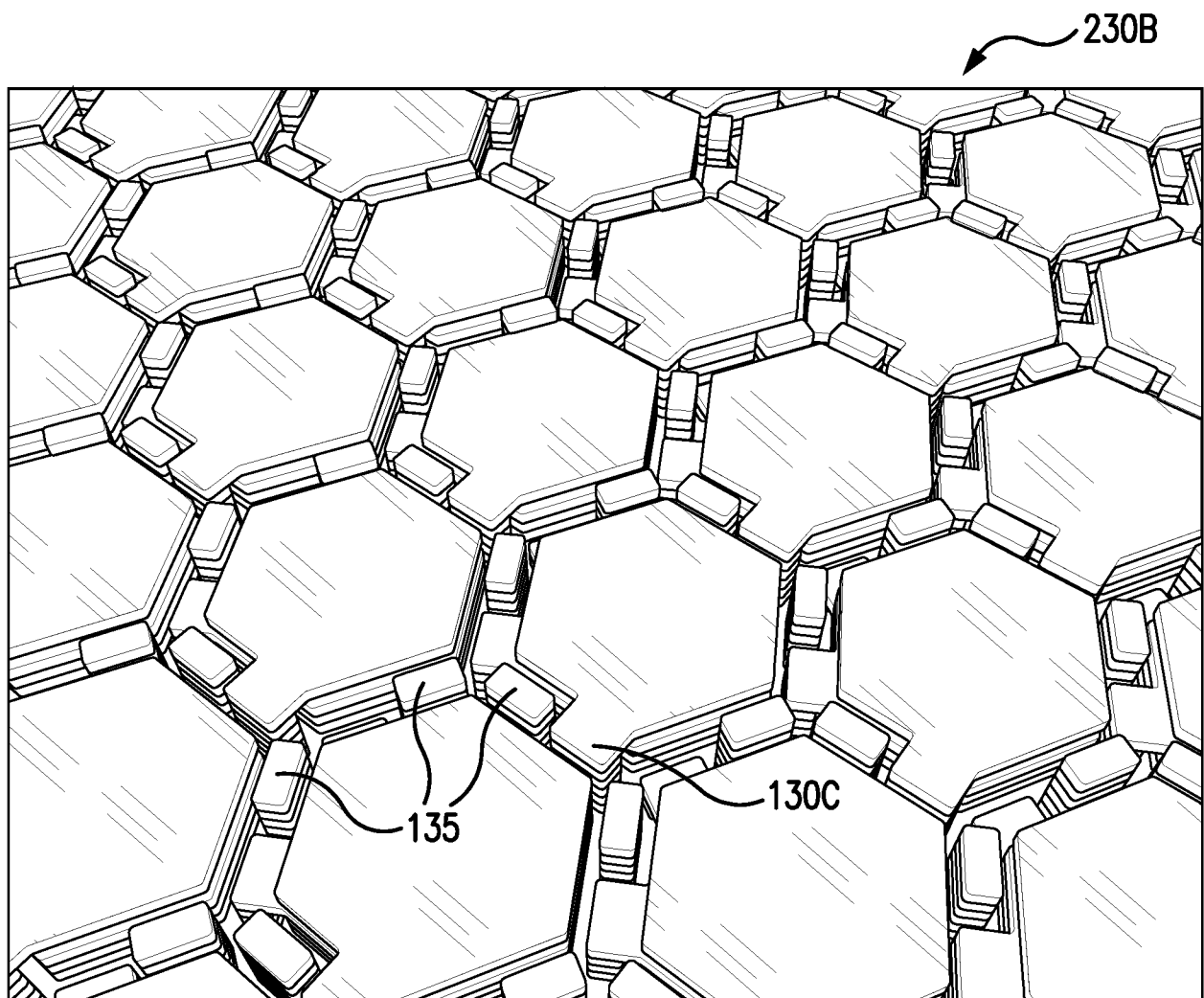


FIG. 11A

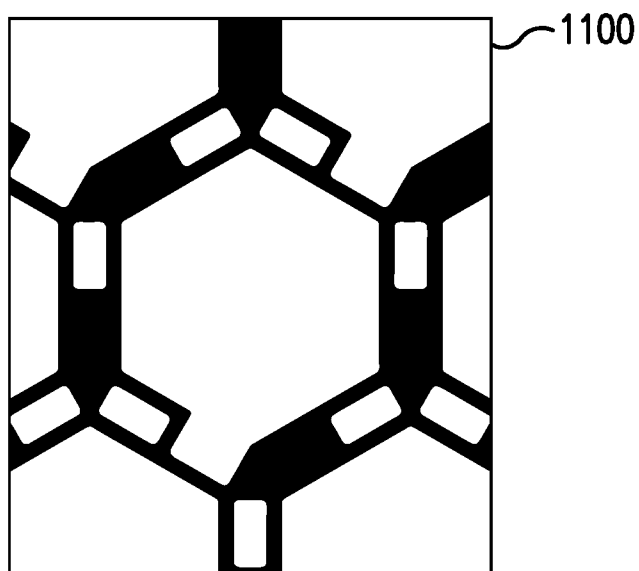


FIG. 11B

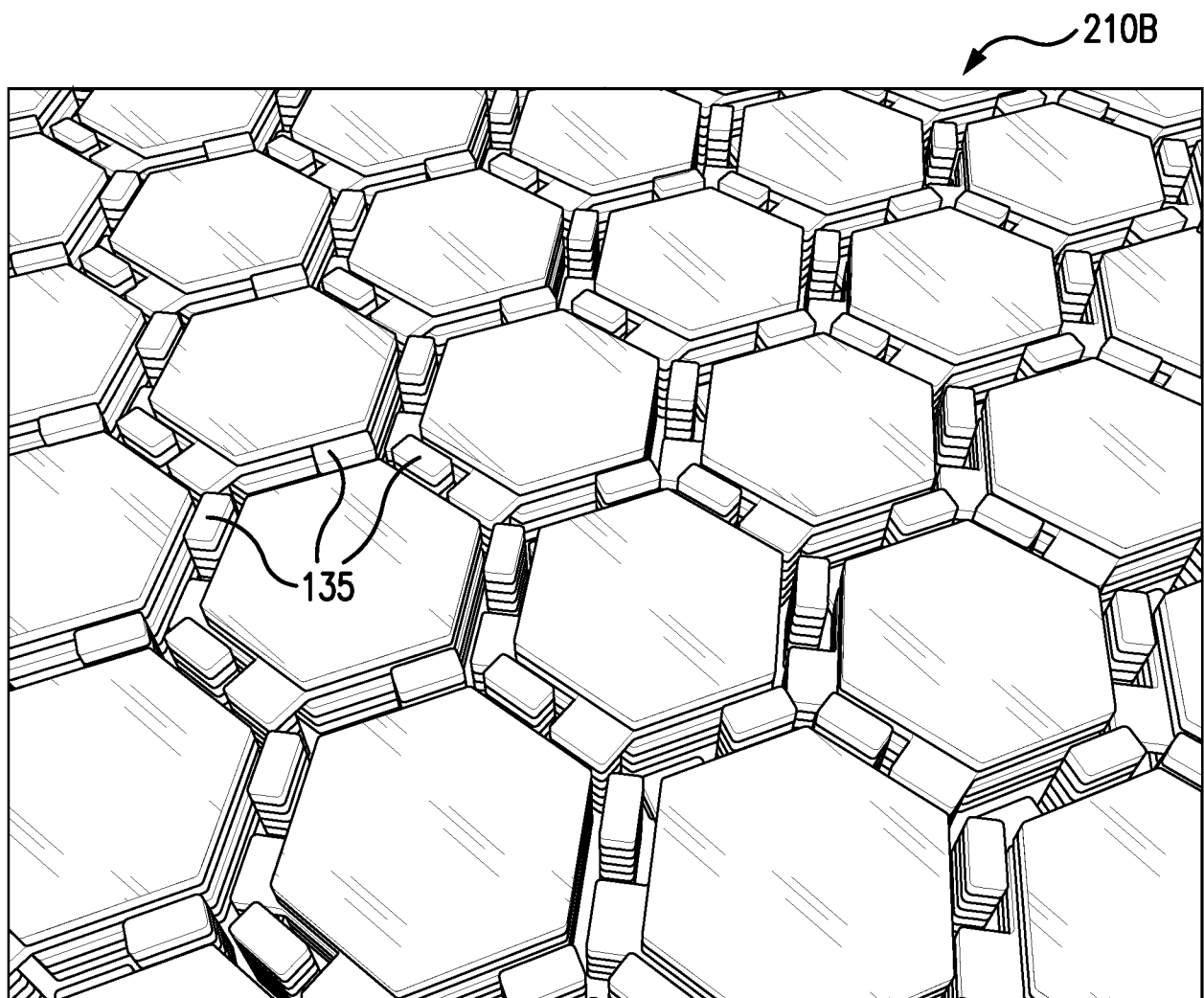


FIG. 12A

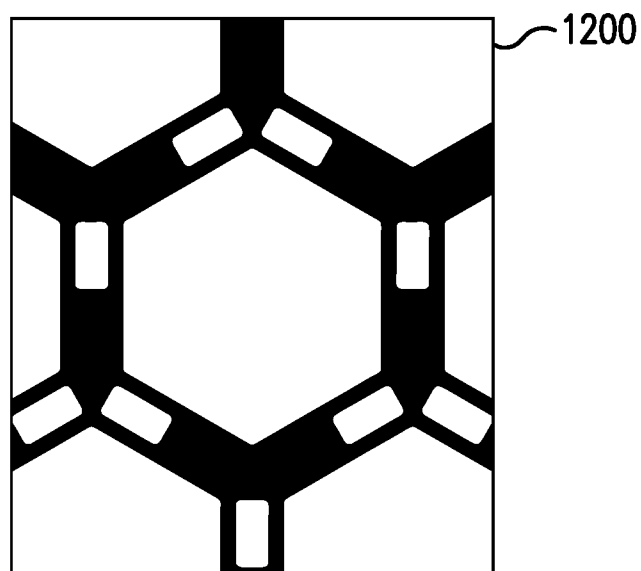


FIG. 12B

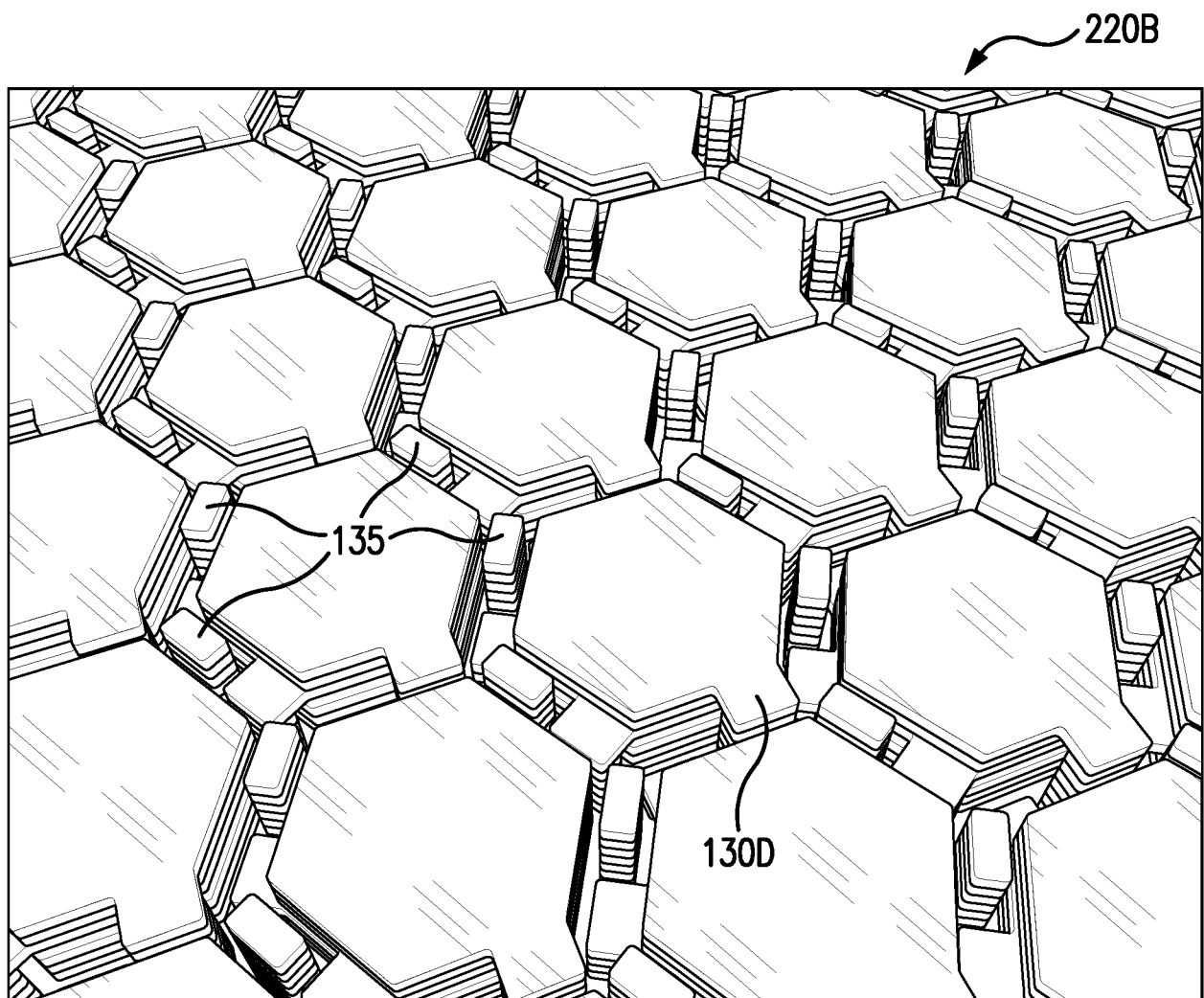


FIG. 13A

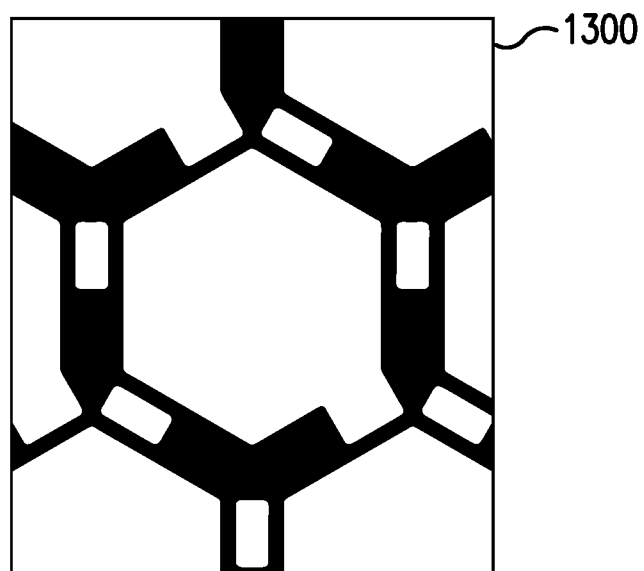


FIG. 13B

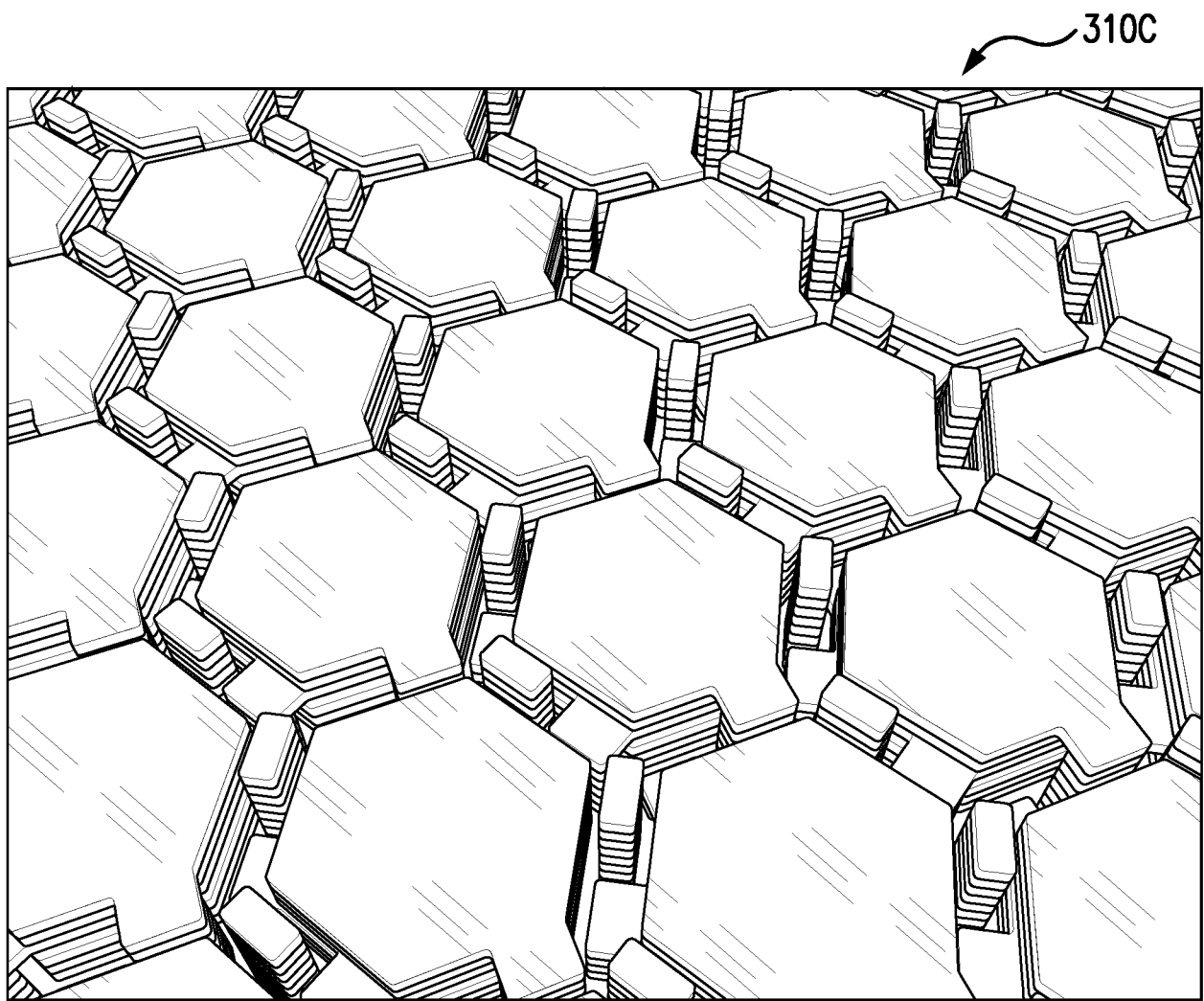


FIG. 14A

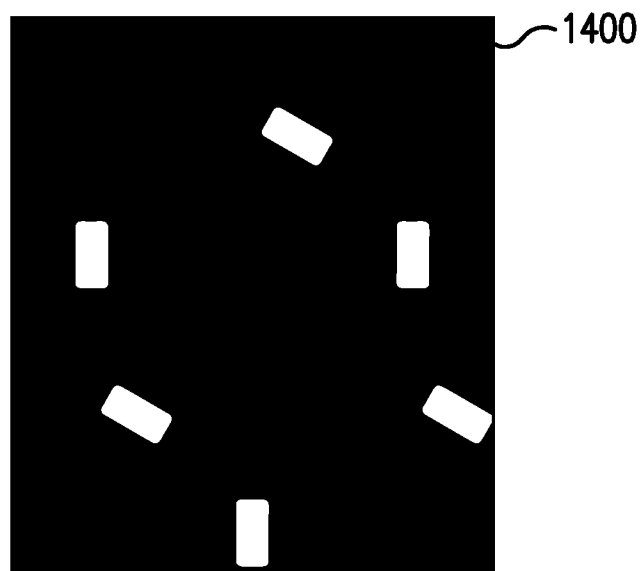


FIG. 14B

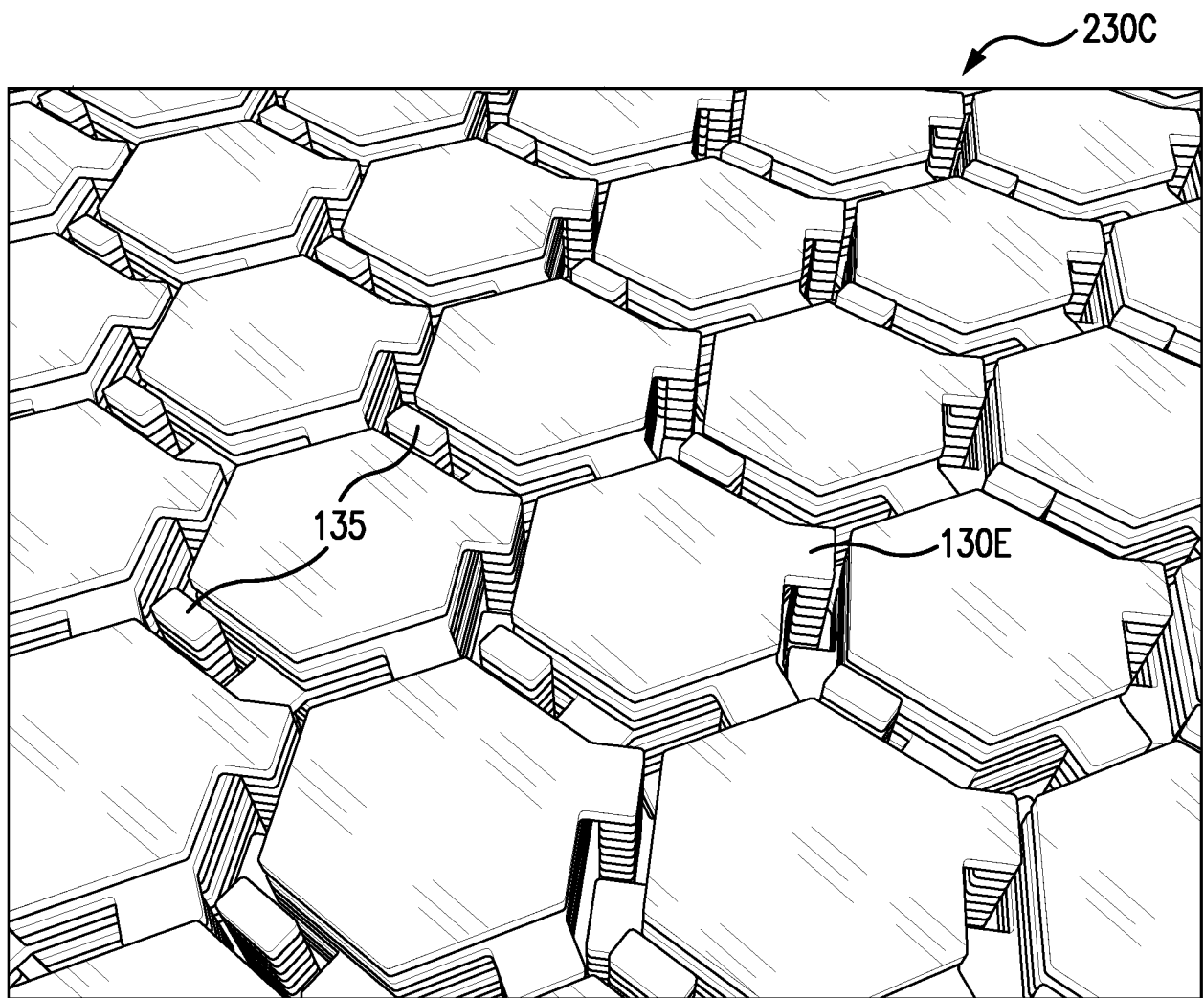


FIG. 15A

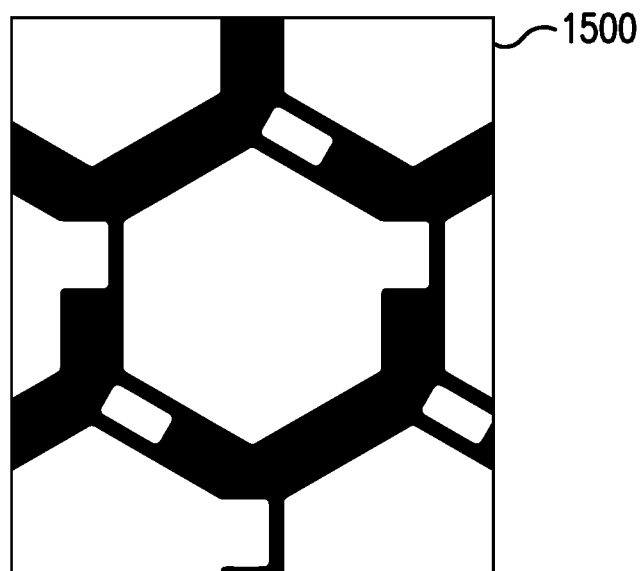


FIG. 15B

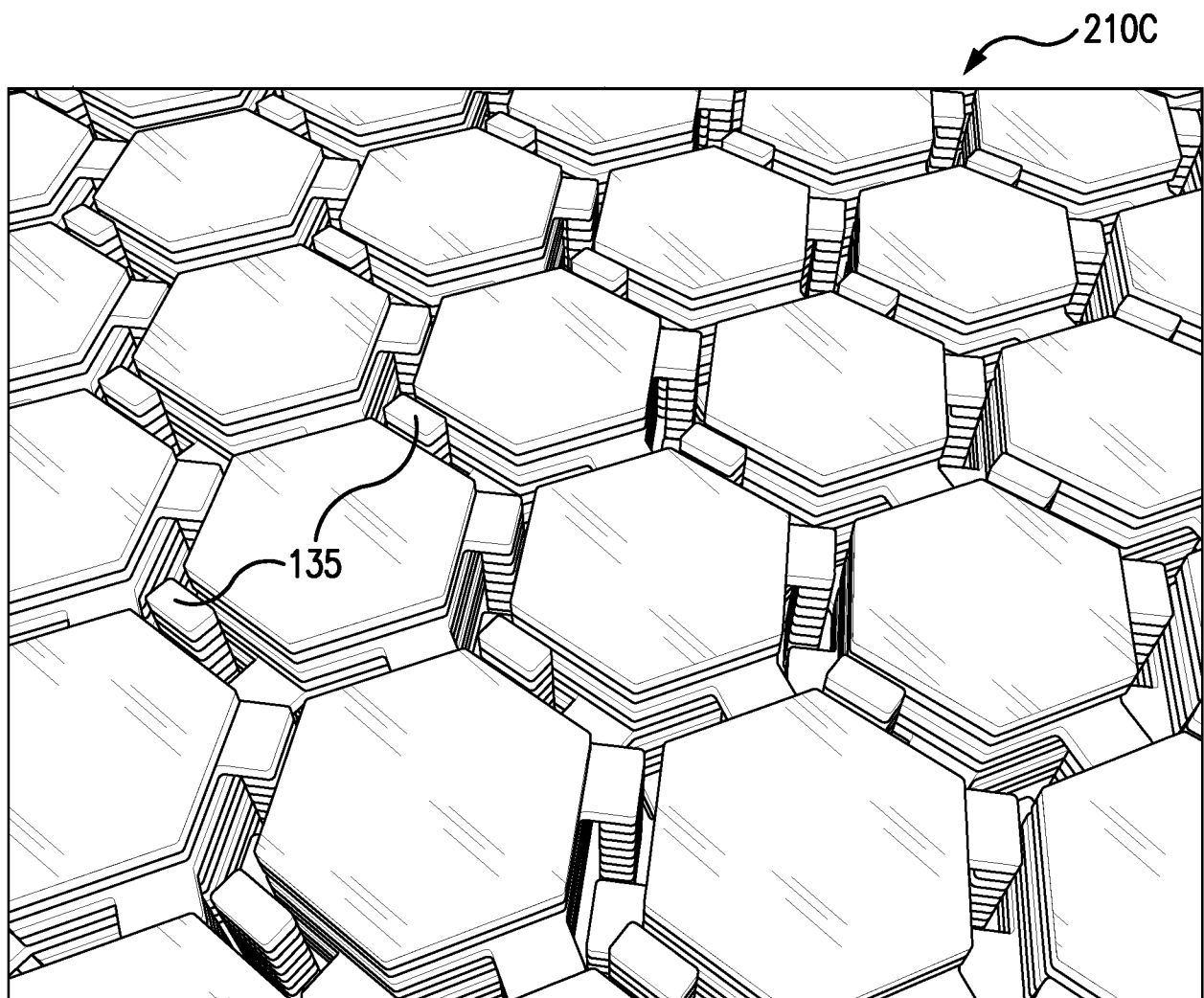


FIG. 16A

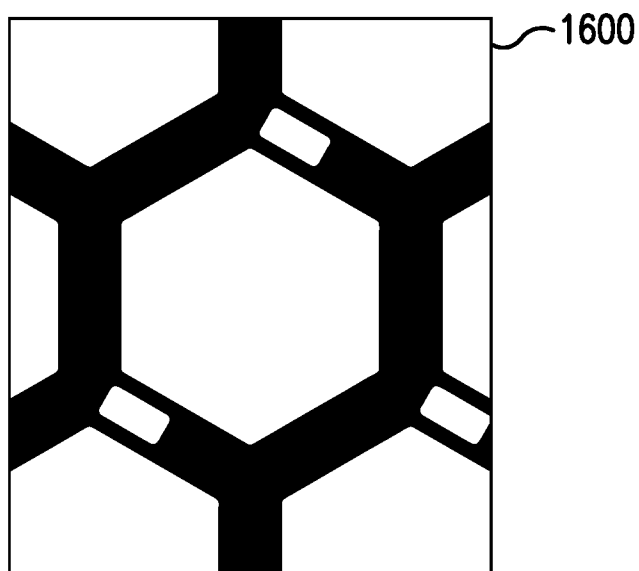


FIG. 16B

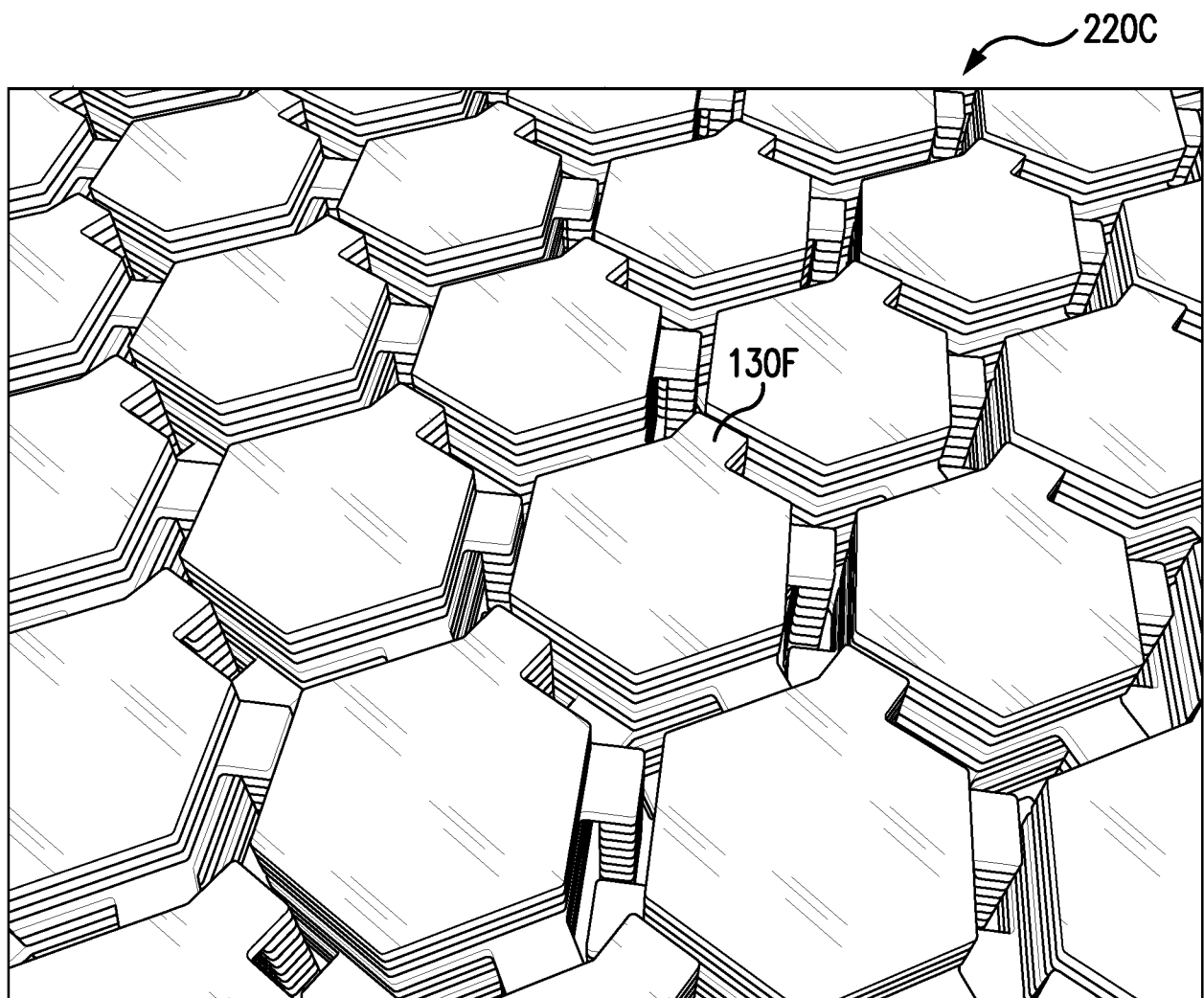


FIG. 17A

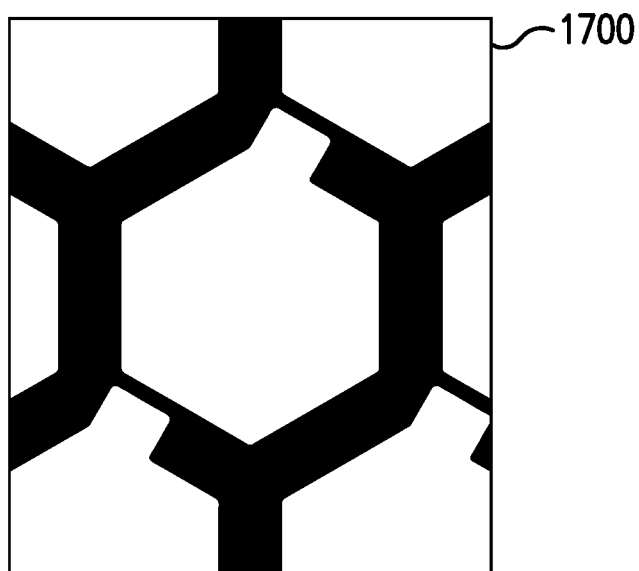
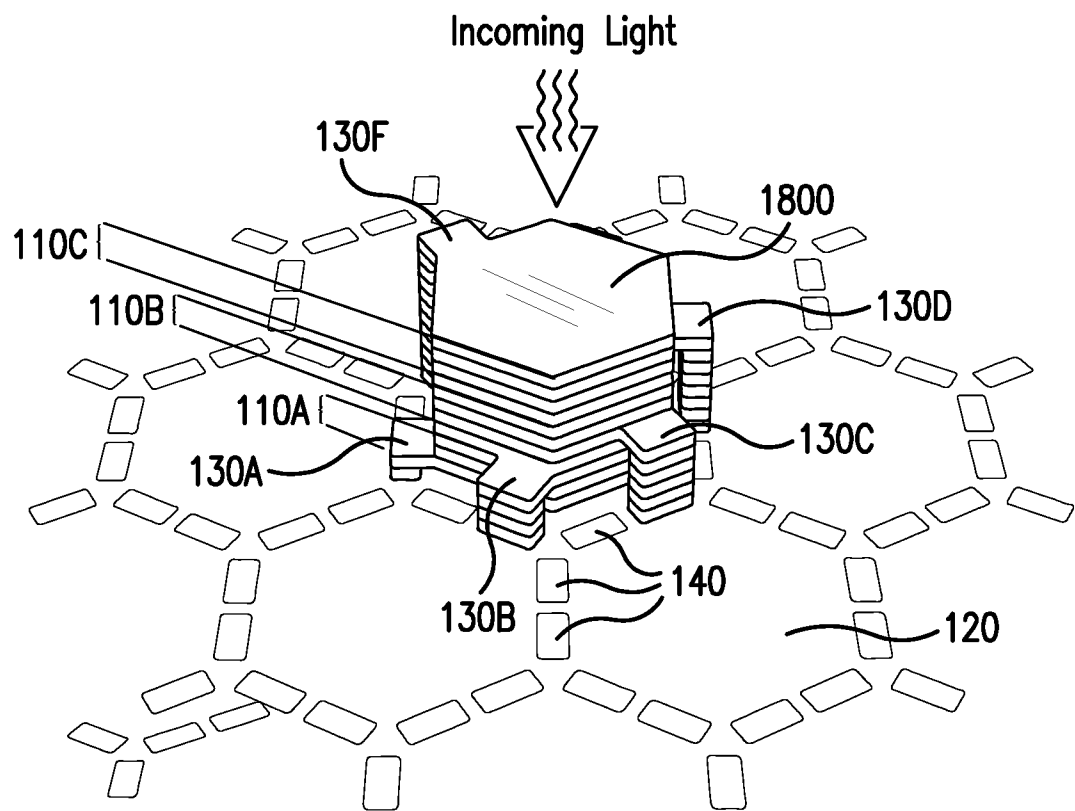
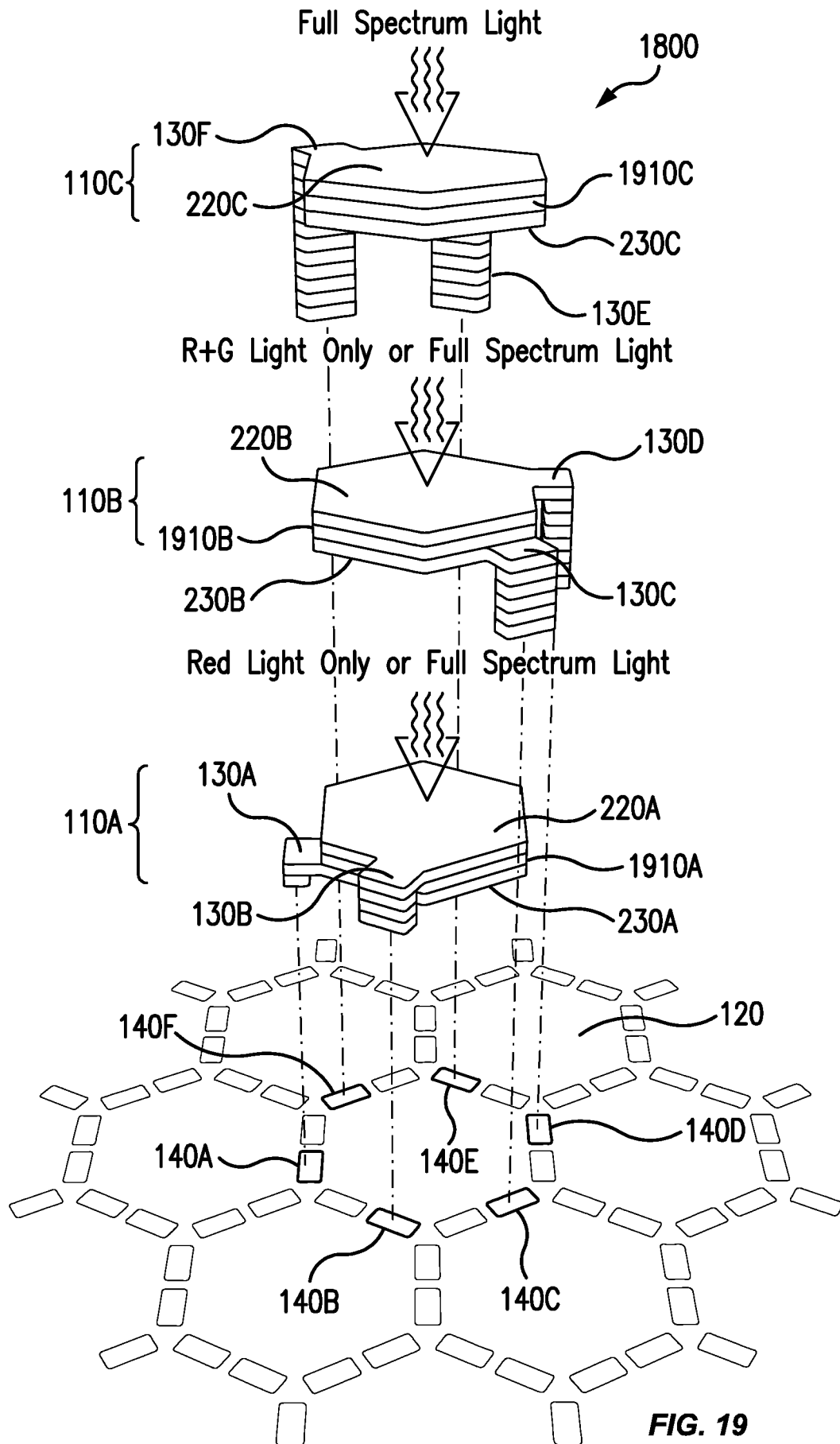
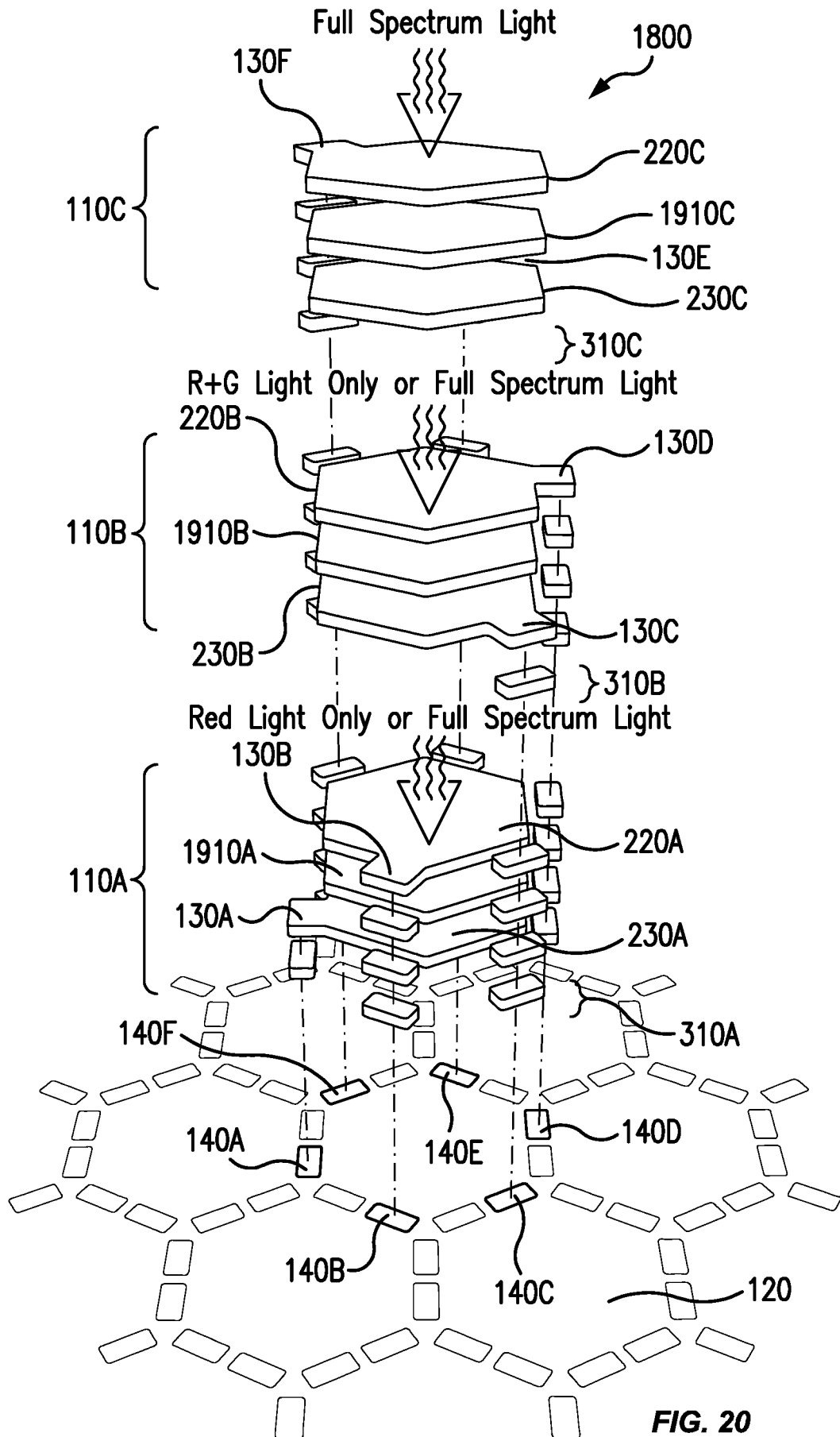
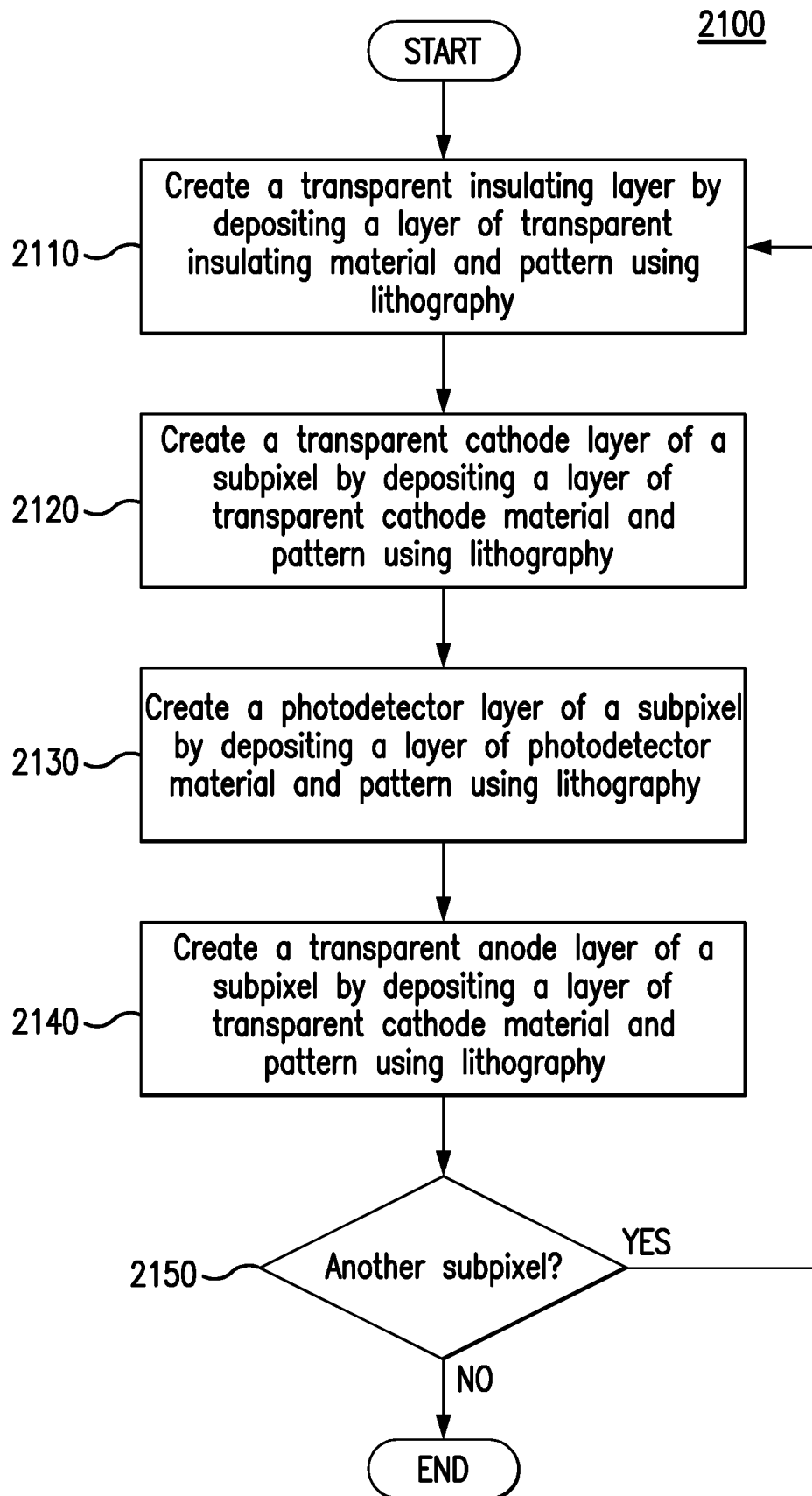


FIG. 17B

**FIG. 18**





**FIG. 21**

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2018/053374

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. H01L27/146 H01L27/30
ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

H01L

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EP0-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	EP 2 172 973 A1 (BOLY MEDIA COMM SHENZHEN CO LT [CN]) 7 April 2010 (2010-04-07) paragraph [0048]; figure 10 -----	1-7, 16-20
X	US 2005/205958 A1 (TANIGUCHI MASATO [JP] ET AL) 22 September 2005 (2005-09-22) paragraph [0063] - paragraph [0076]; figure 5 -----	8-15
Y	FR 2 852 147 A1 (COMMISSARIAT ENERGIE ATOMIQUE [FR]) 10 September 2004 (2004-09-10) figure 6 -----	1-7, 16-20
Y	US 2016/315115 A1 (IZUHA KYOKO [JP] ET AL) 27 October 2016 (2016-10-27) paragraph [0235] - paragraph [0250]; figures 5,7 -----	1
X		8-10,14
Y		1-7, 16-20
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



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Date of the actual completion of the international search

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C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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