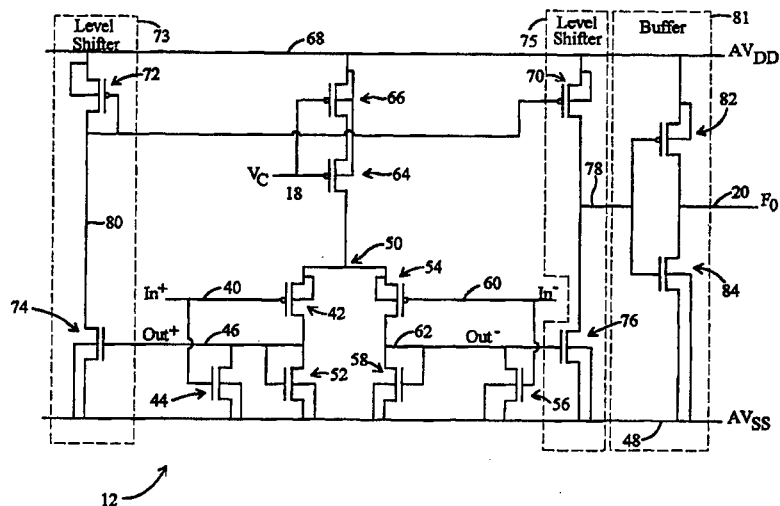




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(54) Title: VOLTAGE CONTROLLED OSCILLATOR WHICH IS INSENSITIVE TO POWER SUPPLY VOLTAGE NOISE



(57) Abstract

A voltage controlled oscillator circuit with a high power supply rejection ratio is described. The oscillator circuit incorporates a clamping transistor with respect to each output terminal which limits the signal swing of the output terminal. The limited voltage swing allows relatively large movements in the power supply and ground voltages without causing significant changes in the frequency of the output signals. Such an oscillator circuit may be incorporated into an integrated circuit characterized by noisy power supply and ground conductors. Additionally, multiple delayed versions of the output frequency may be created using a level shifter circuit and a buffer circuit. The oscillator circuit is relatively quick to react to changes in the controlling voltage, adjusting the oscillation frequency in a relatively short time interval.

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Voltage Controlled Oscillator which is Insensitive to Power Supply Voltage Noise

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to the field of voltage-controlled oscillators and, more particularly, to voltage-controlled oscillators used on integrated circuits with both analog and digital circuits.

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2. Description of the Relevant Art

Integrated circuits are used in a wide variety of applications including computer systems, personal information devices such as cellular phones and electronic organizers, and automobile electronic control systems. As used herein, the term "integrated circuit" refers to any electronic device which embodies a predetermined set of functions upon a single monolithic substrate.

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Integrated circuits may be fabricated in different semiconductor technologies. The selection of a particular semiconductor technology with which to fabricate a particular integrated circuit depends on many factors. The semiconductor technologies available when designing the particular integrated circuit in many ways dictate how the circuit will perform. The cost involved in fabricating the integrated circuit also determines circuit operability given the limited resources in many wafer fabrication sites. Considerations related to the application for which the integrated circuit is designed, such as operable temperature ranges and power consumption constraints imposed by circuit application may also affect the choice of semiconductor technology.

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Complimentary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) technology is a particularly popular semiconductor technology for many applications. Two types of transistors may be formed in a CMOS process: PMOS transistors and NMOS transistors. PMOS transistors and NMOS transistors have four terminals (or connection points): a gate terminal, a source terminal, a drain terminal, and a bulk terminal. Electric current flows from the source terminal to the drain terminal of a transistor when a voltage applied to the gate terminal has either a higher or lower value than the voltage applied to the source terminal, depending on the transistor type. A PMOS transistor is a transistor in which current flows if the voltage applied to the gate terminal is lower than the voltage applied to the source terminal. An NMOS transistor is a transistor in which current flows if the voltage applied to the gate terminal is higher than the voltage applied to the source terminal. The bulk terminal is connected either to the source terminal of the transistor or to a proper bias voltage.

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In both the PMOS transistor and NMOS transistor, the difference in voltage between the gate terminal and the source terminal must be larger in absolute value than a certain voltage before current flow

begins. This certain voltage is referred to as a "threshold" voltage and is the voltage required to form an energized channel between the source and the drain diffusion regions in the PMOS transistor or NMOS transistor. As will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, a transistor is formed on a substrate by diffusing impurities into two regions (a drain diffusion region and a source diffusion region). The two regions are separated by a distance of undiffused substrate material called a channel, over which the gate terminal is constructed. By applying a voltage to the gate terminal of the transistor, the channel is energized such that current may flow between the source diffusion region and the drain diffusion region.

Modern CMOS integrated circuits are being implemented as "mixed signal" devices. In a mixed signal device, both analog and digital signals are used. Analog signals are signals which are continuously variable. They may assume any voltage within a certain voltage range. Digital signals are signals which convey a discrete number of voltages. Transitions between the discrete voltages are well-defined and sharp (i.e. of very short duration), whereas analog signal transitions may be more gradual in some circumstances.

A particular analog device which is often incorporated into integrated circuits is a phase-locked loop (PLL). PLL's are used to provide an internal clock signal which oscillates at a frequency which is a multiple of an externally supplied clock signal. Furthermore, the internal clock signal is "in-phase" (or phase-locked) to the externally supplied clock signal. The internal clock signal is said to be phase-locked if a signal resulting from dividing the internal clock signal by the aforementioned multiple oscillates in synchronization with the externally supplied clock signal. When the internal clock signal and the externally supplied clock signal are phase-locked, the PLL is said to be in a steady state condition. During times in which the PLL is not in steady state (such as power up, for example), the PLL requires a finite amount of time to phase-lock the internal clock signal to the externally supplied clock signal.

PLL's are well-known and generally comprise a phase comparator/detector, a low-pass filter, a voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) and a clock divider. As used herein, the term "oscillator" refers to a device which produces an output signal which varies (or oscillates) in a pattern. The pattern repeats at regular intervals and is therefore said to have a frequency. The frequency is inversely proportional to the regular interval. The VCO is an oscillator whose output signal oscillates at a frequency controlled by an input voltage to the VCO. In other words, the output frequency from the VCO is proportional to the input voltage applied to the VCO.

Before digital integrated circuits were equipped with PLL's and other analog circuits, they were purely digital devices. Digital circuits were designed in which one of the power supplies was connected to the substrate. For example, in an N-well process in which a P-type substrate is used, the Vss (or ground) power supply is connected to the substrate. The substrate has a resistance associated with it. Therefore, switching currents which flow to the ground power supply may cause voltage differences across the substrate. Furthermore, switching currents for digital circuits are quite high since digital signals are characterized by sharp transitions. In order to quickly charge or discharge a capacitive circuit, large currents are often

required. For example, hundreds of milliamps or more are common switching currents in modern integrated circuits which contain digital circuits. Even if the substrate resistance is quite low, the voltage differences may be significant.

5 Substrate voltage differences caused by digital switching currents are of particular importance to analog circuits embodied on the same substrate as the digital circuits. If the ground voltage that a particular transistor is exposed to is different than the ground voltage of a nearby transistor, then a signal input to the two transistors will cause one of the transistors to begin conducting current before the other transistor. This phenomena occurs because the signal exceeds a threshold voltage at the first transistor before the signal
10 exceeds a threshold voltage at the second transistor. Therefore, the "switch point" of the circuit (i.e. the input voltage level at which the circuit transitions from one value to another) changes as a function of the variance in the power supply values across the substrate. Switch point movement, in the case of an oscillator circuit, causes the oscillating output signal to change frequencies or deviate from the pattern. This switch point movement is often referred to as "jitter". Jitter may also be caused by momentary changes in the voltage
15 range through which an output signal transitions. These momentary changes are often due to variations in the power supply voltages. For example, if the ground voltage changes due to switching currents and the other power supply voltage does not change similarly, the voltage range changes by the amount of the ground voltage change. An oscillator circuit which is insensitive to switching noise in the power supplies is desired. Insensitivity to switching noise is also referred to as having high "power supply rejection ratio".

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The effects of jitter, as outlined above, are in large part solved by an oscillator circuit according to the present invention. The oscillator circuit includes a clamping transistor configured to limit the signal
25 swing of an oscillator output terminal. The limited voltage swing allows relatively large movements in the power supply and ground voltages without causing significant changes in the frequency of oscillator output signals. Therefore, the oscillator circuit demonstrates a high power supply rejection ratio. Such an oscillator circuit is advantageously incorporated into an integrated circuit characterized by noisy power supply and ground conductors. The oscillator circuit would be characterized by relatively low jitter in such an
30 environment, enhancing the speed of operation of the integrated circuit. Additionally, multiple output signals may be created using a level shifter circuit and a buffer circuit in each delay stage within the VCO. The level shifter shifts the limited voltage swing signal to a rail-to-rail signal and the buffer is capable of significant current flow so that a relatively large capacitive load may be driven. The output signal from each delay stage in the VCO is delayed from the previous delay stage's output signal. The multiple delayed versions of the
35 output frequency on the output signals may be advantageously used throughout the mixed signal integrated circuit.

The oscillator circuit is relatively quick to react to changes in the controlling voltage, advantageously adjusting the oscillation frequency in a shorter time interval than previous voltage-controlled

oscillators. Therefore, the oscillator may be used in high frequency applications with better results than may be achievable with other voltage-controlled oscillators.

5 The present invention contemplates an oscillator comprising a current source, a first transistor, a second transistor, and a clamping transistor. The first transistor is coupled between the current source and an output conductor and is configured with a first gate terminal connected to an input conductor. This first transistor is capable of charging the output conductor. The second transistor is coupled between the output conductor and a ground conductor and is configured with a second gate terminal connected to the input conductor. This second transistor is capable of discharging the output conductor. Coupled between the
10 output conductor and the ground conductor is the clamping transistor, which is configured with a third gate terminal connected to the output conductor. The clamping transistor is capable of limiting an output voltage conveyed on the output conductor.

The present invention further contemplates a level shifter comprising at least four transistors. A
15 first transistor is coupled between an output conductor and a ground conductor and is configured with a first gate terminal connected to a first input conductor. This first transistor is capable of discharging the output conductor. A second transistor is coupled between the output conductor and a power supply conductor and is configured with a second gate terminal connected to an internal conductor. The second transistor is capable of discharging the output conductor. Coupled between the internal conductor and the power supply
20 conductor is a third transistor which is configured with a third gate terminal connected to the internal conductor. The third transistor is capable of charging the internal conductor. A fourth transistor is coupled between the internal conductor and the ground conductor and is configured with a fourth gate terminal connected to a second input conductor. The fourth transistor is capable of discharging the internal
25 conductor.

The present invention still further contemplates a method of creating an output of an oscillator which is insensitive to power supply noise comprising limiting the voltage of the oscillator output to a voltage range between a ground voltage and a voltage less than a power supply voltage.

30 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

Other objects and advantages of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

35 Figure 1 is a block diagram of a voltage-controlled oscillator in accordance with the present invention having three delay stages;

Figure 2 is a block diagram of a voltage-controlled oscillator in accordance with the present invention having two delay stages; and

Figure 3 is a circuit diagram of a delay stage in accordance with the present invention.

While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific
5 embodiments thereof are shown by way of example in the drawings and will herein be described in detail. It
should be understood, however, that the drawings and detailed description thereto are not intended to limit
the invention to the particular form disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications,
equivalents and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the
appended claims.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Turning now to Figure 1, a block diagram of an embodiment of a voltage-controlled oscillator 10 is
15 shown. This embodiment is configured with a first delay stage 12, a second delay stage 14, and a third delay
stage 16. The delay stages are provided with an input control voltage (V_c) on a control voltage input
conductor 18. The input control voltage is referenced to a power supply voltage delivered to the delay stages
on a power supply conductor (as shown in Figure 3 as power supply conductor 68). Each delay stage
provides a substantially identical amount of delay between the switching of a differential pair of input signals
20 and the switching of a differential pair of output signals. The amount of delay is determined by the control
voltage. A "differential pair" of input or output signals are configured to convey a particular signal in
opposite senses. One of the pair conveys the positive sense, and the other of the pair conveys the negative
sense. As one signal of the pair is transitioning toward a high voltage, the other of the pair is transitioning
toward a low voltage. The differential pair of input signals are conveyed to input terminals. The input
25 terminals are labeled as $In+$ and $In-$ on each delay stage. $In+$ is the input terminal receiving the positively
sensed input signal, and $In-$ is the terminal receiving the negatively sensed input signal. The differential pair
of output terminals are labeled $Out+$ and $Out-$ on each delay stage. $Out+$ is the output terminal conveying the
positively sensed output signal, and $Out-$ is the output terminal conveying the negatively sensed output
signal.

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In the embodiment shown in Figure 1, the $Out+$ output terminal of first delay circuit 12 is coupled to
the $In+$ input terminal of second delay circuit 14 via conductor 26. Similarly, the $Out-$ output terminal of
first delay circuit 12 is coupled to the $In-$ input terminal of second delay circuit 14 via conductor 28. In a
similar fashion, the $Out+$ and $Out-$ output terminals of second delay circuit 14 are coupled to the $In+$ and $In-$
35 input terminals of third delay circuit 16 via conductors 30 and 32, respectively. Finally, the $Out+$ and $Out-$
output terminals of third delay circuit 16 are coupled to the $In+$ and $In-$ input terminals of first delay circuit
12 via conductors 34 and 36, respectively.

Each of the delay stages of VCO 10 are inverting delay stages. That is, an $Out+$ output signal of a

delay stage transitions to a high voltage when an In+ input signal of the delay stage transitions to a low voltage. Conversely, an Out- output signal of the delay stage transitions to a low voltage when an In+ input signal of the delay stage transitions to a high voltage. Similar relationships exist between the In- input signal and the Out- output signal. Therefore, by coupling an odd number of delay stages such as shown in Figure 1,
5 an oscillation may be achieved. For example, if the In+ input signal of first delay stage 12 transitions high, the Out+ output signal of first delay stage 12 (and the In+ input signal of second delay stage 14) transitions low at a rate determined by Vc. Therefore, at a rate determined by Vc, the Out+ output signal of second delay stage 14 (and the In+ input signal of third delay stage 16) transitions high. The Out+ output signal of third delay stage 16 then transitions low at a rate determined by Vc. Therefore, the In+ input signal of first
10 delay circuit 12 (which is coupled to the Out+ output signal of third delay circuit 16) transitions low as a result of its earlier transition high. Similarly, the transition to low of the In+ input signal of first delay circuit 12 will cause a future transition high of the In+ input signal of first delay circuit 12. VCO 10 therefore oscillates. For a given control voltage Vc, VCO 10 will oscillate at a particular frequency. It is noted that the In- input signal of each delay stage operates in a similar fashion but in opposite sense of the In+ input
15 signal of that delay stage. Similarly, the Out- output signal of each delay stage operates in a similar fashion but in opposite sense of the respective delay stage's Out+ output signal.

As will be explained in more detail with respect to Figure 3, the In+, In-, Out+, and Out- signals are "limited swing" signals. As used herein, the term "limited swing" signals refers to signals which assume
20 voltage levels in a limited range of voltages encompassed between the power supply voltage level and ground voltage level supplied to the delay stages. In one embodiment, the limited swing of VCO 10 is a range of voltages from ground to a small delta above ground. However, VCO 10 is designed for an integrated circuit with digital circuitry. Digital circuits interpret a power supply voltage as a logical one value and a ground voltage as a logical zero value. Other values do not have defined meanings in digital circuits. Therefore, an
25 output signal which swings completely to the power supply voltage and the ground voltage (i.e. "rail-to-rail") is needed. The embodiment of Figure 1 has three outputs that swing from rail-to-rail, one from each delay stage. These outputs are labeled Fo on each delay stage. First delay stage 12 has a first Fo output conductor 20, second delay stage 14 includes a second Fo output conductor 22, and third delay stage 16 includes a third Fo output conductor 24. Either first Fo output conductor 20, second Fo output conductor 22, or third Fo
30 output conductor 24 is used as a clock input to various digital circuits on an integrated circuit with VCO 10. Alternatively, two or more of the Fo output conductors 20, 22, and 24 may be used.

It is noted that any odd number of delay stages may be coupled similar to that shown in Figure 1 to form a VCO 10. It is further noted that an even number of delay stages may be used. In embodiments
35 having an even number of delay stages, the Out- output terminal of the last delay stage is coupled to the In+ input terminal of the first delay stage. Additionally, the Out+ output terminal of the last delay stage of the even number of delay stages is coupled to the In- input terminal of the first delay stage. A configuration of VCO 10 with two delay stages 12 and 14 is shown in Figure 2.

Turning now to Figure 3, an embodiment of first delay circuit 12 is shown. Second delay circuit 14

and third delay circuit 16 are substantially identical to first delay circuit 12. In+ terminal 40 is shown coupled to the gate terminals of two transistors: PMOS transistor 42 and NMOS transistor 44. NMOS transistor 44 is coupled between Out+ terminal 46 and ground conductor 48. Ground conductor 48 is powered, during use, with a ground voltage. PMOS transistor 42 is coupled between Out+ terminal 46 and node 50. Also coupled between Out+ terminal 46 and ground conductor 48 is NMOS transistor 52. NMOS transistor 52 has a gate terminal connected to Out+ terminal 46, and serves to clamp the voltage on Out+ terminal 46 when PMOS transistor 42 is charging Out+ terminal 46.

When the voltage on In+ terminal 40 transitions toward ground, current flows through PMOS transistor 42, charging Out+ terminal 46. Current flow through NMOS transistor 44 reduces and substantially stops as the voltage on In+ terminal 40 transitions to ground voltage. As the voltage on Out+ terminal 46 rises, the voltage difference between the gate and source terminals of NMOS transistor 52 exceeds a threshold voltage and NMOS transistor 52 begins current flow. The voltage on Out+ terminal 46 continues increasing until the current flowing through NMOS transistor 52 substantially equals the current flowing through PMOS transistor 42. At this point, the voltage on Out+ terminal 46 ceases increasing. Therefore, NMOS transistor 52 has clamped the voltage on Out+ terminal 46.

When the voltage on In+ terminal 40 transitions toward a power supply voltage conveyed on a power supply conductor 68, PMOS transistor 42 substantially ceases current flow and NMOS transistor 44 discharges Out+ terminal 46 to the ground voltage. Out+ terminal 46 therefore conveys voltages between ground and the clamped voltage value (which is greater than ground). As will be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the function of PMOS transistor 54, NMOS transistor 56, NMOS transistor 58, In- terminal 60, and Out- terminal 62 is similar to PMOS transistor 42, NMOS transistor 44, NMOS transistor 52, In+ terminal 40, and Out+ terminal 46, respectively.

It is noted that PMOS transistors 42 and 54 are configured with bulk terminal connections to node 50. Other transistors in first delay circuit 12 have the standard bulk connections to power supply conductor 68 (for PMOS transistors) or ground conductor 48 (for NMOS transistors). This bulk connection is used for PMOS transistors 42 and 54 to prevent what is often referred to as body effect. Body effect occurs when the voltage on the source terminal of a transistor is different than the voltage on the bulk connection. Body effect causes the current capability of a transistor to degrade. By connecting the bulk to the source, the voltage difference (and therefore body effect) is eliminated.

First delay circuit 12 is further configured with a voltage-controlled current source comprised of PMOS transistors 64 and 66. A voltage-controlled current source supplies current proportional to an input voltage. PMOS transistors 64 and 66 are connected in series and are coupled between power supply conductor 68 and node 50. The gate terminals of both PMOS transistor 64 and PMOS transistor 66 are coupled to control voltage input conductor 18. Therefore, PMOS transistors 64 and 66 control the amount of current available to PMOS transistor 42 and PMOS transistor 54. That is, PMOS transistors 64 and 66 (and

therefore the voltage conveyed on control voltage input conductor 18) control the rate at which Out+ terminal 46 and/or Out- terminal 62 are charged and discharged. The delay from the switching of the differential input pair of the In+ and In- input terminals to the switching of the differential output pair of the Out+ and Out- output signals is therefore controlled by the voltage conveyed on control voltage input conductor 18. Furthermore, when first delay circuit 12 and similarly configured second delay circuit 14 and third delay circuit 16 are configured into VCO 10, the oscillation frequency of VCO 10 is controlled by the voltage conveyed on control voltage input conductor 18.

The current source formed by PMOS transistors 64 and 66 is considerably simpler than typical current sources which may involve an operational amplifier in a unity gain configuration with a sense resistor and a current mirror circuit. Hence, the present current source may be implemented in a smaller silicon area. Since the present configuration uses fewer transistors, the current source shown in Figure 3 consumes less power than conventional current sources. Furthermore, operational amplifiers are low bandwidth devices due to the resistive/capacitive compensation that they require. Therefore, operational amplifiers are slow to react to changes in the control voltage. In contrast, the current source shown in Figure 3 reacts much faster. The reaction time is proportional to the operational speed of PMOS transistors 64 and 66. Additionally, since the control voltage on control voltage input conductor 18 is referenced to the power supply voltage on power supply conductor 68, the control voltage is relatively constant with respect to the power supply voltage. Therefore, the current through PMOS transistors 64 and 66 is relatively constant with respect to changes in the power supply voltage. Since the current through PMOS transistors 64 and 66 controls the output frequency of delay stage 12, the delay stage has a high power supply rejection ratio with respect to its output frequency.

The advantages of the circuit shown in Figure 3 may be better understood with reference to the following basic equation for capacitive charging:

$$I = C \, dv/dt$$

Out+ terminal 46 and Out- terminal 62 are coupled to substantially capacitive "loads". As used herein, the term "load" refers to electrical devices which are connected to an output of a circuit such that the electrical devices receive the current and voltage values placed on the output by the circuit. Through PMOS transistors 64 and 66, the current available for charging the Out+ and Out- output terminals is fixed for a given value of Vc (referenced to the power supply voltage). The capacitance (C in the equation above) is substantially fixed, although slight variations occur due to variance in P-N junction capacitances within the transistors. Therefore, the rate of change of the voltage (dv/dt in the above equation) is fixed as long as the voltage swing range is constant. If the voltage were allowed to swing between the ground voltage and the power supply voltage, then the voltage swing would not be constant due to the switching noise on the power supplies causing variations in the voltage range. However, NMOS transistors 52 and 58 clamp the voltage swing to a smaller fixed range than the full ground-to-power supply range (also referred to as the rail-to-rail voltage

swing).

Furthermore, the circuit of Figure 3 is configured with a relatively small number of transistors. Therefore, the circuit may be implemented on a small area and the various ground conductor and power supply conductor connections may be physically quite close to each other. Connecting the ground and power supply connections close to each other minimizes the substrate voltage difference problem, which is magnified by larger distances between connections. Additionally, the small number of transistors allows for easier matching from delay stage to delay stage on an integrated circuit such that a substantially similar delay is achieved by each delay stage. The term "matching" refers to achieving similar current characteristics in a pair of transistors. The smaller number of transistors additionally contributes to lower power consumption than more complicated circuits. As will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, prior VCO's often implemented complicated circuits such as op-amps, bandgap voltage references, current references, and comparators. The circuit of Figure 3 does not implement such circuits.

First delay circuit 12 is additionally configured with a level shifter circuit. The level shifter circuit is indicated in Figure 3 by boxes 73 and 75, and is formed in this embodiment by PMOS transistors 70 and 72 and NMOS transistors 74 and 76. A level shifter circuit is a circuit which shifts input voltages within an input range of voltages to output voltages within an output range of voltages. The level shifter circuit shown in Figure 3 is configured to shift the limited voltage swing signals on Out+ terminal 46 and Out- terminal 62 into a rail-to-rail voltage swing signal on a conductor 78. In particular, a voltage on Out+ terminal 46 at the top of the limited voltage swing range and a corresponding ground voltage on Out- terminal 62 is shifted into a power supply voltage on conductor 78. Additionally, a ground voltage on Out+ terminal 46 and a corresponding voltage on Out- terminal 62 at the top of the limited voltage swing range is shifted into a ground voltage on conductor 78. Each of these cases will be explained in more detail below. It is noted that voltages within the limited voltage swing range associated with Out+ terminal 46 and Out- terminal 62 are shifted into intermediate voltages between the power supply voltage and the ground voltage.

As can be seen in Figure 3, PMOS transistor 70 is coupled between power supply conductor 68 and conductor 78 with its gate terminal coupled to an internal conductor 80. PMOS transistor 72 is coupled between power supply conductor 68 and internal conductor 80 with its gate terminal similarly coupled to internal conductor 80. Coupled between internal conductor 80 and ground conductor 48 is NMOS transistor 74 which has its gate terminal coupled to Out+ terminal 46. NMOS transistor 76 is coupled between conductor 78 and ground conductor 48 with its gate terminal coupled to Out- terminal 62.

In the case in which Out+ terminal 46 is conveying a relatively high voltage level and Out- terminal 62 is conveying a ground voltage level, NMOS transistor 76 does not conduct current and NMOS transistor 74 does conduct current. NMOS transistor 74 discharges internal conductor 80, decreasing the voltage level on the gate terminals of PMOS transistors 72 and 70. When the voltage difference between the gate terminals and source terminals of PMOS transistors 72 and 70 exceeds a threshold voltage, PMOS transistors 72 and 70 conduct current. Since NMOS transistor 76 is not conducting current, PMOS transistor 70 charges

conductor 78 to the power supply voltage conveyed on power supply conductor 68.

5 As Out+ terminal 46 transitions to a ground voltage and Out- terminal 62 transitions to a relatively high voltage, the current flow through NMOS transistor 74 reduces and substantially stops. PMOS transistor 72 charges internal conductor 80 to within a threshold voltage difference of the power supply voltage conveyed on power supply conductor 68. Therefore, current flow through PMOS transistor 72 and PMOS transistor 70 substantially stops. Concurrently, current flow through NMOS transistor 76 is increasing due to the voltage on Out- terminal 62. NMOS transistor 76 therefore discharges conductor 78. Conductor 78 is discharged to a ground voltage level.

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An output buffer circuit (indicated by box 81 on Figure 3) is coupled to conductor 78. The buffer circuit comprises an inverter circuit with PMOS transistor 82 and NMOS transistor 84. PMOS transistor 82 and NMOS transistor 84 are typically larger than other transistors in first delay circuit 12 and therefore have more current capability than the other transistors. PMOS transistor 82 and NMOS transistor 84 are better equipped to charge and discharge the large capacitive loads that may be connected to Fo output conductor 20.

15 It is noted that the level shifter circuit and output buffer circuit are used to provide the rail-to-rail clock signal Fo on Fo output conductor 20. If this rail-to-rail clock signal is not used from a particular delay stage in an embodiment of VCO 10, then the level shifter circuit and output buffer circuit may be removed from that stage. It is further noted that the circuit shown in Figure 3 is configured for an N-well process. In a P-well process, a similar circuit is contemplated. Additionally, similar circuits fabricated in other semiconductor fabrication processes are contemplated. Specifically contemplated are circuits fabricated in bipolar, JFET, and gallium arsenide semiconductor fabrication processes.

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In accordance with the above disclosure, a high speed oscillator circuit has been described with a high power supply rejection ratio. Such an oscillator may be advantageously incorporated into a mixed signal integrated circuit. Low jitter values may be achieved, enhancing the speed of operation of the integrated circuit. Additionally, multiple delayed versions of the output frequency may be created which may be advantageously used throughout the mixed signal integrated circuit. Furthermore, the oscillator circuit is quick to react to changes in the controlling voltage, advantageously adjusting the oscillation frequency in a shorter time interval than previous voltage-controlled oscillators.

30 Numerous variations and modifications will become apparent to those skilled in the art once the above disclosure is fully appreciated. It is intended that the following claims be interpreted to embrace all such variations and modifications.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A voltage controlled oscillator comprising:

5 a current source;

a first transistor coupled between said current source and an output conductor wherein said first transistor is configured with a first gate terminal connected to an input conductor and wherein said first transistor is capable of charging said output conductor;

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a second transistor coupled between said output conductor and a ground conductor wherein said second transistor is configured with a second gate terminal connected to said input conductor and wherein said second transistor is capable of discharging said output conductor; and

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a clamping transistor coupled between said output conductor and said ground conductor wherein said clamping transistor is configured with a third gate terminal connected to said output conductor and wherein said clamping transistor is capable of limiting an output voltage conveyed on said output conductor.

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2. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 1 wherein said current source comprises a voltage control input conductor and wherein said current source is capable of producing a current proportional to a voltage level conveyed on said voltage control input conductor.

25 3. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 2 wherein said current source further comprises a pair of series-connected transistors coupled between a power supply conductor and said first transistor wherein said pair of series-connected transistors are configured with a fourth gate terminal and a fifth gate terminal and wherein said fourth gate terminal and said fifth gate terminal are coupled to said voltage control input conductor.

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4. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 3 wherein said series-connected transistors are PMOS transistors.

5. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 1 wherein said first transistor is a PMOS transistor.

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6. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 1 wherein said first transistor is configured with a substrate connection connected to said current source.

7. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 1 wherein said second transistor is an NMOS

transistor.

8. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 1 wherein said clamping transistor is an NMOS transistor.

5

9. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 1 further comprising:

10 a third transistor coupled between said current source and a second output conductor wherein said third transistor is configured with a sixth gate terminal connected to a second input conductor and wherein said third transistor is capable of charging said second output conductor;

15 a fourth transistor coupled between said second output conductor and said ground conductor wherein said fourth transistor is configured with a seventh gate terminal connected to said second input conductor and wherein said fourth transistor is capable of discharging said second output conductor; and

20 a second clamping transistor coupled between said second output conductor and said ground conductor wherein said second clamping transistor is configured with an eighth gate terminal connected to said second output conductor and wherein said second clamping transistor is capable of limiting a second output voltage conveyed on said second output conductor.

25 10. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 9 further comprising:

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a fifth transistor coupled between a third output conductor and said ground conductor wherein said fifth transistor is configured with a ninth gate terminal connected to said output conductor and wherein said fifth transistor is capable of discharging said third output conductor;

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a sixth transistor coupled between said third output conductor and said power supply conductor wherein said sixth transistor is configured with a tenth gate terminal connected to an internal conductor and wherein said sixth transistor is capable of charging said third output conductor;

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a seventh transistor coupled between said power supply conductor and said internal conductor wherein said seventh transistor is configured with an eleventh gate terminal connected to said internal conductor and wherein said seventh transistor is capable of charging said internal conductor; and

an eighth transistor coupled between said internal conductor and said ground conductor wherein said eighth transistor is configured with a twelfth gate terminal connected to said second output conductor and wherein said eighth transistor is capable of discharging said internal conductor.

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11. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 10 further comprising an output buffer coupled to said third output conductor for providing greater driving capability for a load wherein said output buffer is an inverter circuit.

10 12. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 9 further comprising:

a second current source;

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a ninth transistor coupled between said second current source and a fourth output conductor wherein said ninth transistor is configured with a thirteenth gate terminal connected to said output conductor and wherein said ninth transistor is capable of charging said fourth output conductor;

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a tenth transistor coupled between said fourth output conductor and said ground conductor wherein said tenth transistor is configured with a fourteenth gate terminal connected to said output conductor and wherein said tenth transistor is capable of discharging said fourth output conductor; and

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a third clamping transistor coupled between said fourth output conductor and said ground conductor wherein said third clamping transistor is configured with a fifteenth gate terminal connected to said fourth output conductor and wherein said third clamping transistor is capable of limiting a third output voltage conveyed on said fourth output conductor.

30

13. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 12 further comprising:

an eleventh transistor coupled between said second current source and a fifth output conductor wherein said eleventh transistor is configured with a sixteenth gate terminal connected to said second output conductor and wherein said eleventh transistor is capable of charging said fifth output conductor;

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a twelfth transistor coupled between said fifth output conductor and said ground conductor wherein said twelfth transistor is configured with a seventeenth gate terminal connected to said second output conductor and wherein said twelfth transistor is capable of discharging said fifth output conductor; and

5 a fourth clamping transistor coupled between said fifth output conductor and said ground conductor wherein said fourth clamping transistor is configured with an eighteenth gate terminal connected to said fifth output conductor and wherein said fourth clamping transistor is capable of limiting a fourth output voltage conveyed on said fifth output conductor.

14. The voltage controlled oscillator as recited in claim 13 wherein said fourth output conductor is coupled to said second input conductor and wherein said fifth output conductor is coupled to said input conductor.

10 15. A level shifter comprising:

15 a first pulldown transistor coupled between an output conductor and a ground conductor wherein said first transistor is configured with a first gate terminal connected to receive a first input signal of said level shifter and wherein said first transistor is capable of discharging said output conductor;

20 a first pullup transistor coupled between said output conductor and a power supply conductor wherein said second transistor is configured with a second gate terminal connected to an internal conductor and wherein said second transistor is capable of charging said output conductor;

25 a second pullup transistor coupled between said internal conductor and said power supply conductor wherein said third transistor is configured with a third gate terminal connected to said internal conductor and wherein said third transistor is capable of charging said internal conductor; and

30 a second pulldown transistor coupled between said internal conductor and said ground conductor wherein said fourth transistor is configured with a fourth gate terminal connected to receive a second input signal of said level shifter and wherein said fourth transistor is capable of discharging said internal conductor.

16. The level shifter as recited in claim 15 wherein said first pulldown transistor is an NMOS transistor.

35 17. The level shifter as recited in claim 15 wherein said first pullup transistor is a PMOS transistor.

18. The level shifter as recited in claim 15 wherein said second pullup transistor is a PMOS transistor.

19. The level shifter as recited in claim 15 wherein said second pulldown transistor is an NMOS transistor.

20. The level shifter as recited in claim 15 further comprising a buffer circuit coupled to said output conductor for providing greater charging capability for a load.

21. The level shifter as recited in claim 20 wherein said buffer circuit comprises an inverter circuit.

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22. A method of creating an output of an oscillator which is insensitive to power supply noise comprising:

limiting the voltage of said oscillator output to a voltage range between a ground voltage and a voltage less than a power supply voltage.

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23. The method as recited in claim 22 further comprising providing a second oscillator output having a between said ground voltage and said power supply voltage.

24. The method as recited in claim 22 further comprising powering said oscillator with a power supply voltage.

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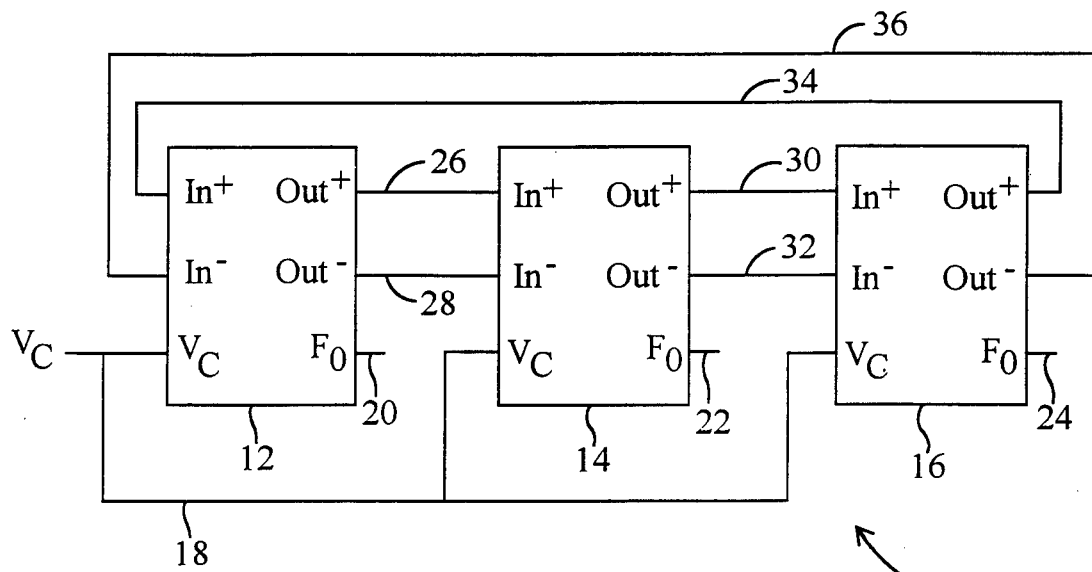


Fig. 1

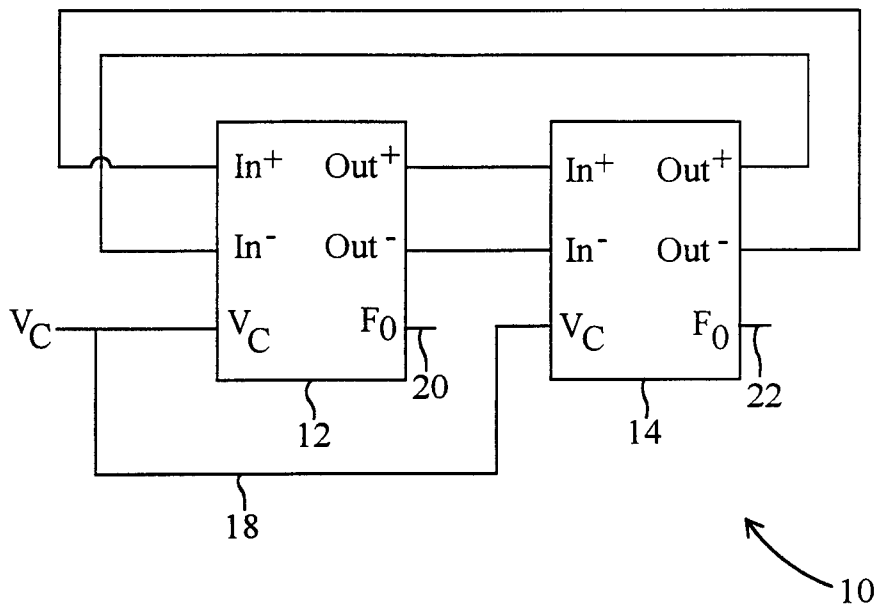


Fig. 2

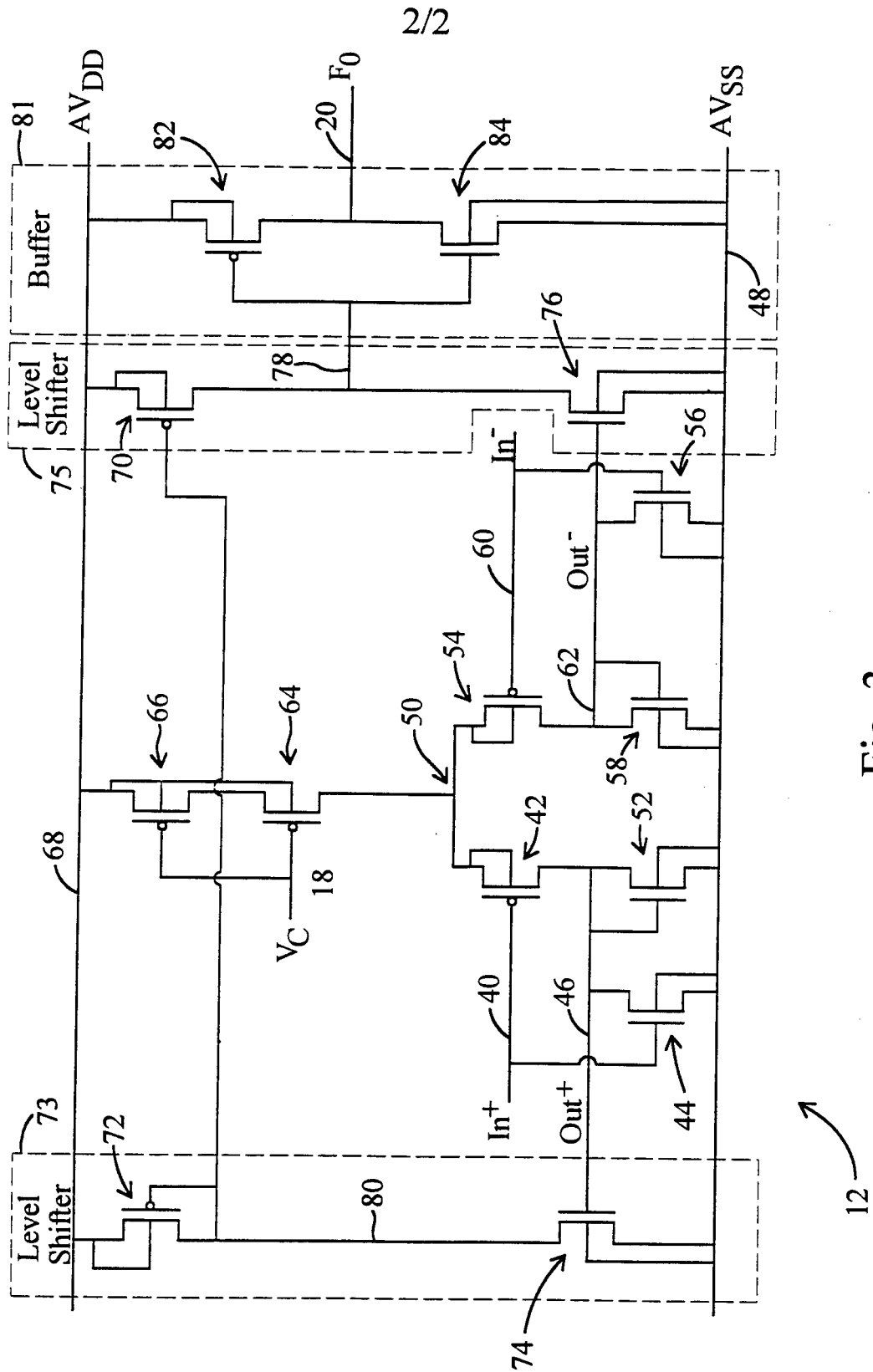


Fig. 3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Inte: onal Application No
PCT/US 96/10366

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IPC 6 H03K3/03				
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) IPC 6 H03K H03L				
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 practical, search terms used)				
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT				
Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.		
X	EP,A,0 361 529 (NEC CORP.) 4 April 1990 see column 2, line 53 - column 4, line 53; figure 1 see column 5, line 57 - column 6, line 5 ---	1-10		
X	PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 9, no. 288 (E-358) [2011] , 15 November 1985 & JP,A,60 128709 (HITACHI K.K.), 9 July 1985, see abstract ---	1-9		
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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Patent family members are listed in annex.				
* Special categories of cited documents :				
<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none; vertical-align: top;"> *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed </td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none; vertical-align: top;"> *T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention *X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art. *&* document member of the same patent family </td> </tr> </table>			*A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention *X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art. *&* document member of the same patent family
A document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention *X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art. *&* document member of the same patent family			
Date of the actual completion of the international search <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">3 October 1996</div>	Date of mailing of the international search report <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">25. 10. 96</div>			
Name and mailing address of the ISA European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+ 31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax (+ 31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Butler, N</div>			

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

 International Application No
 PCT/US 96/10366

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	IEEE JOURNAL OF SOLID STATE CIRCUITS, vol. 28, no. 12, 1 December 1993, NEW YORK,US, pages 1273-1282, XP000435900 J. MANEATIS ET. AL.: "PRECISE DELAY GENERATION USING COUPLED OSCILLATORS" see page 1277, column 2, line 12 - page 1278, column 1, line 12; figure 7 ---	1-9
X	EP,A,0 496 440 (N. V. PHILIPS GLOIELAMPENFABRIEKEN) 29 July 1992 see page 3, line 25 - page 4, line 12; figure 1 ---	1-9
A	EP,A,0 523 854 (INMOS LTD.) 20 January 1993 see page 4, line 29 - line 39; figure 3 ---	1
A	US,A,4 920 284 (A. DENDA) 24 April 1990 see column 4, line 36 - column 6, line 33; figure 4 -----	1

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