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Chu et al.

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[54] **MULTI-VOLTAGE CIRCUIT ARRANGEMENT AND METHOD FOR ACCOMMODATING HYBRID ELECTRONIC SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

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Related U.S. Application Data

[63] Continuation-in-part of Ser. No. 129,990, Sep. 29, 1993.

[51] **Int. Cl.**⁶ **H03K 19/0175**; G05F 1/00

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **327/519**; 326/80; 326/63

[58] **Field of Search** 326/80, 81, 63; 327/519, 547

[56] **References Cited**

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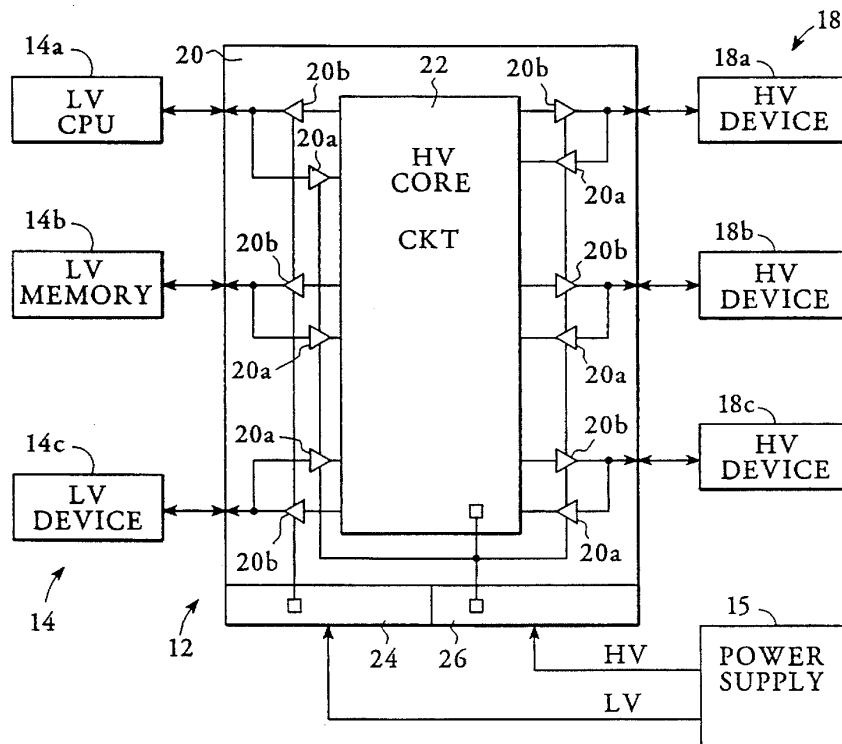
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Primary Examiner—William L. Sikes
Assistant Examiner—Tiep H. Nguyen
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Schneck & McHugh

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A multi-voltage circuit on a semiconductor chip including core circuitry driven by a power supply voltage equal to the voltage of a selected external device operating in connection with the semiconductor chip, and having input/output circuitry in selected regions for operating in connection with external devices having the same operating voltage and other external devices having a selected substantially lower operating voltage. Peripheral input/output circuit regions of at least first and second kinds are established for interfacing with the respective high and low voltage external devices. According to one version of the invention, the input/output circuitry directed toward interfacing with external devices operating at a particular voltage level is concentrated at a particular peripheral region in the periphery of the semiconductor chip. According to another version of the invention, multiple regions of input/output circuitry are established for external devices at the same voltage level. These multiple regions may be configured by the system designer to operate with any combination of high voltage and low voltage external devices.

14 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



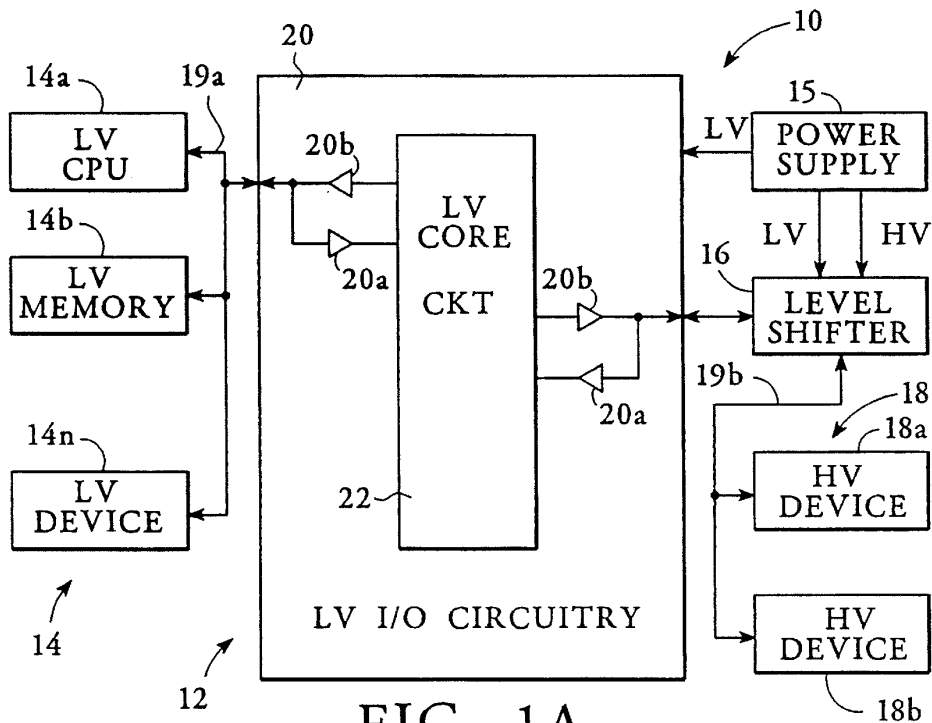


FIG. 1A
(PRIOR ART)

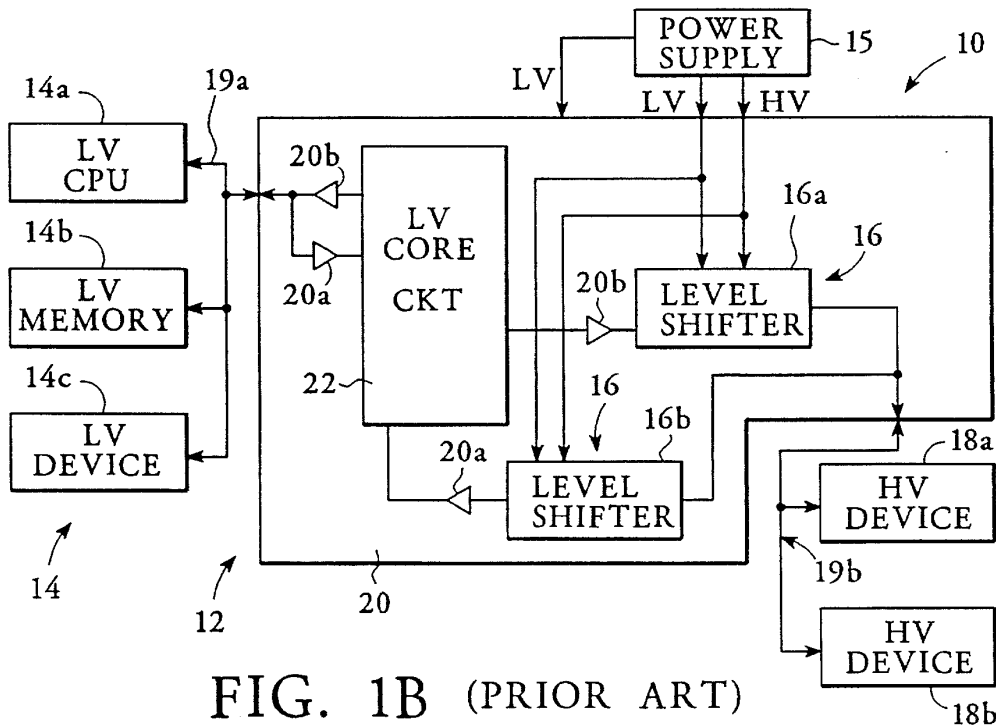


FIG. 1B (PRIOR ART)

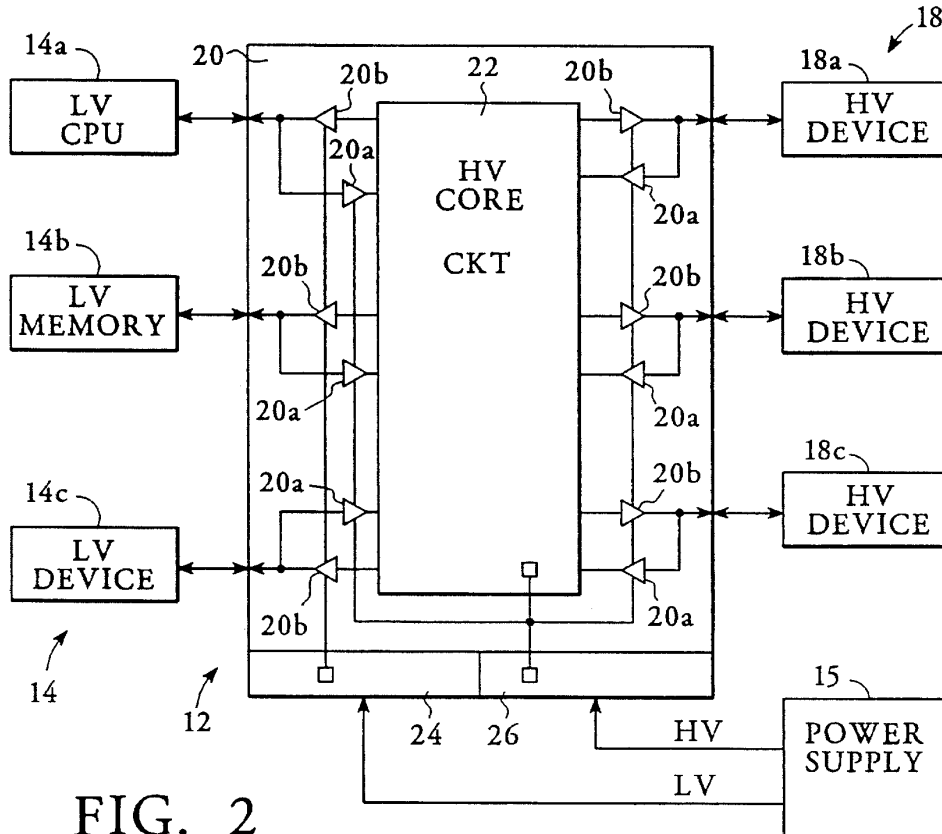


FIG. 2

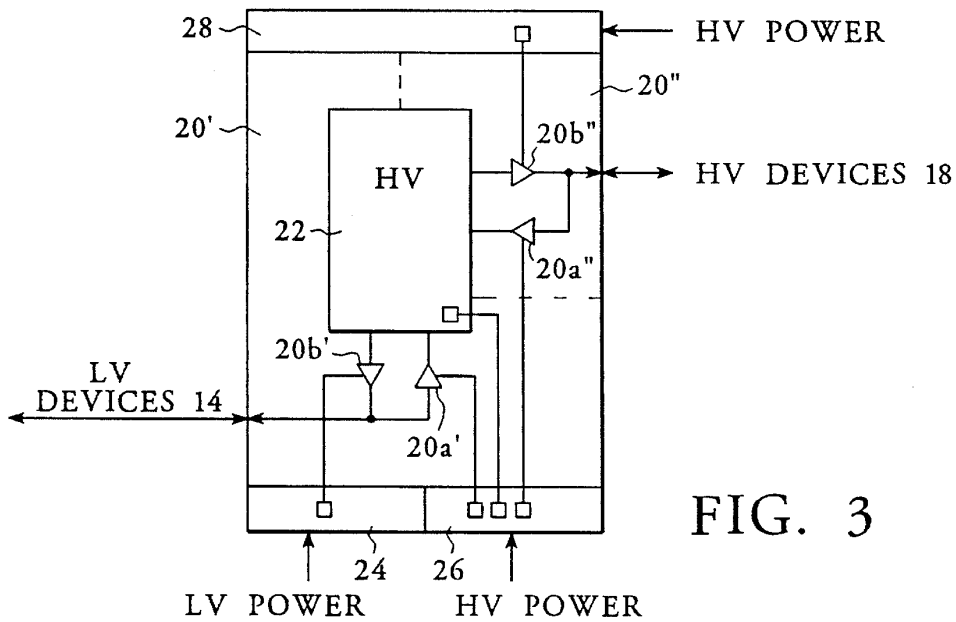


FIG. 3

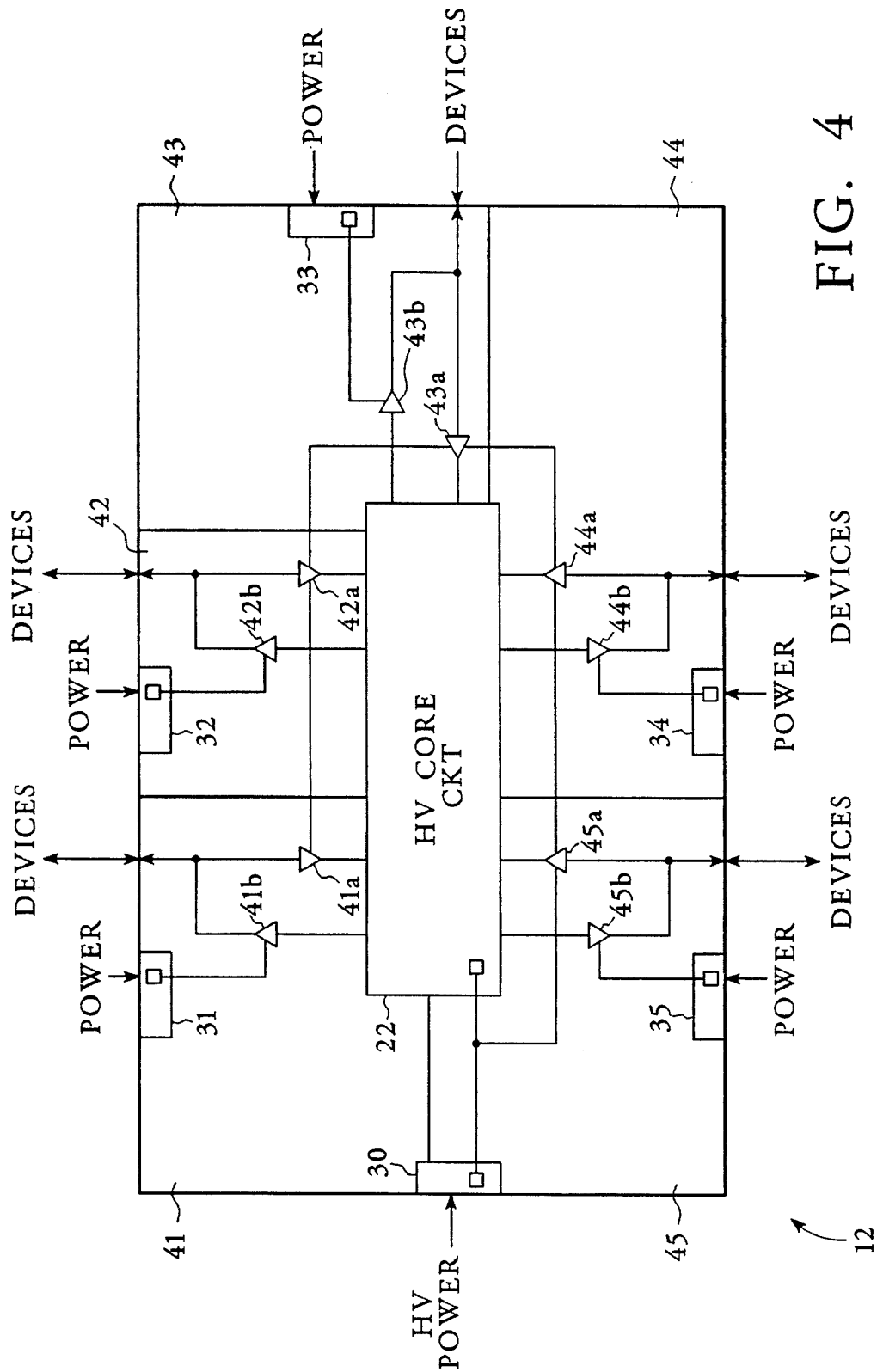


FIG. 4

**MULTI-VOLTAGE CIRCUIT
ARRANGEMENT AND METHOD FOR
ACCOMMODATING HYBRID ELECTRONIC
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

**CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATION**

This application is a continuation in part of application Ser. No. 08/129,990, filed Sep. 29, 1993.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The field of this invention is that of multi-voltage circuit arrangements and methods, and more particularly multi-voltage circuit arrangements and methods for accommodating hybrid system requirements.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Semiconductor technology is increasingly being driven by market demand for low-power, portable computer systems. Such computer systems include a range of new products directed toward laptop, palmtop and pen-based computers. The effects of this market influence include a strong tendency to increasingly rely upon lower voltage integrated circuits (IC's) and application specific integrated circuits (ASIC's). These low voltage devices help to extend the battery life of the particular systems in which they are used. However, this extended battery life is obtained at the cost of system performance. For example, the delay through a semiconductor device is dependent upon a number of parameters, including the supply voltage. As the supply voltage decreases, the overall speed of the device diminishes. Another concern when using low voltage devices is the reality that existing components such as expansion cards, disk drives and other external devices are built using components that operate at the higher voltage levels. Thus, low voltage devices must include additional circuitry known as level shifters to accommodate pre-existing high voltage devices.

FIG. 1A shows a multi-voltage circuit arrangement according to the prior art. In particular, FIG. 1A schematically illustrates a hybrid multi-chip circuit system 10, including a semiconductor chip 12 and peripheral devices such as external low voltage devices 14, a power supply 15, a level shifter 16 and external high voltage devices 18. The semiconductor chip 12 is a low voltage device in the sense that it is powered by a semiconductor chip power supply having a voltage level lower than the power supply voltage level of some of the peripheral devices to which the semiconductor chip 12 is connected. Currently, many peripheral devices are preferably powered at either 5 volts or 3.3 volts DC. An example of a high voltage device 18 would accordingly be a device which relies upon a 5 volt power supply, while a low voltage device would be a device which is powered by a 3.3 volt power supply. A range of low voltage devices 14a-14c are shown in FIG. 1A. These devices include a low voltage central processing unit (CPU) 14a, a low voltage memory 14b and a generic low voltage device 14c. Similarly, FIG. 1A shows a plurality of different kinds of high voltage input/output devices 18, respectively 18a and 18b. A power supply 15 provides high voltage (HV) power and low voltage (LV) power to a level shifter 16, and low voltage power to the semiconductor chip 12.

In the case of the prior art multi-chip circuit system 10 shown in FIG. 1A, the low voltage devices 14 are directly connected to a semiconductor chip 12 through a suitable bus

19a, and the high voltage devices 18 are directly connected to the level shifter 16, which in turn is connected to the semiconductor chip 12. The level shifter 16 is a well-known interface device which is effective for receiving output signals from the semiconductor chip 12 and conveying these signals to the high voltage devices 18. The level shifter 16 is further effective for receiving input signals from high voltage devices 18 to be conveyed to the semiconductor chip 12. The level shifter 16 is connected to the high voltage devices 18 along a bus 19b. Busses 19a and 19b can connect one or more devices to the semiconductor chip 12. A bus can further be a serial or parallel electrical connection having a plurality of electric lines.

The semiconductor chip 12 in the prior art of FIG. 1A includes a region of low voltage input/output circuitry 20 and a region of low voltage core circuitry 22 connected to the low voltage input/output circuitry 20. The low voltage core circuitry 22 includes, for example, logic circuitry and memory circuitry for performing a variety of selected operations with respect to a range of external devices and systems. The low voltage input/output circuitry 20 includes input buffers 20a and output buffers 20b. The semiconductor chip 12 is completely unitary in that all of its regions are powered by the same voltage supply level, which is low compared to a high voltage level being employed to power a selected one or more of high voltage devices 18.

FIG. 1B shows another version of the prior art, according to which the level shifters 16 are integrated into the semiconductor chip 12, as opposed to being off chip as shown in FIG. 1A. According to this version of the prior art, a level shifter 16b serves to convert the low voltage output of the low voltage core circuitry 22 to a sufficiently high voltage to drive the high voltage devices 18a and 18b. Conversely, the level shifter 16a converts the high voltage output of the high voltage devices 18a and 18b to the low voltage level required by the low voltage core circuitry 22. With the exception of the level shifters 16a and 16b, the semiconductor chip 12 is supplied with low voltage power (LV) from the power supply 15. The level shifters 16a and 16b are provided with both low voltage power (LV) and high voltage power (HV).

Unfortunately, the use of the level shifters 16a and 16b, whether integrated into the semiconductor chip 12 or used as a separate, discrete element external to the semiconductor chip 12, tends to increase costs significantly. In the case of the external level shifter 16 of FIG. 1A, the increased cost includes the cost of the additional component, a reduction in reliability as a result of an additional connection which may fail and added expense in terms of an opportunity cost since available space is consumed which might effectively have been employed in a more worthwhile fashion. In the case of the on-chip level shifters 16a and 16b of FIG. 1B, the same loss of space detriment is suffered, except that the space relates to available chip topography, rather than real estate consumed on a chip carrier or circuit board. An additional cost is the design cost in customizing the semiconductor chip 12 to include the level shifters 16a and 16b as part of the internal circuitry of the semiconductor chip 12.

It is therefore desirable to have a high voltage semiconductor device which is comparable to the low voltage devices, such as the semiconductor chip 12 of the prior art of FIGS. 1A and 1B, in terms of power conservation, while at the same time obviating the need for the level shifters 16. Such high voltage semiconductor devices would also have speed advantages over the low voltage devices, being operable at a higher voltage. The present invention takes advantage of the fact that the most power hungry logic is the

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