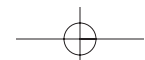
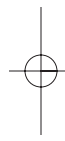
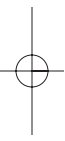
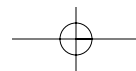
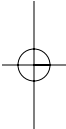
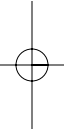

Microprocessor Design





Microprocessor Design

A Practical Guide from Design Planning
to Manufacturing

Grant McFarland

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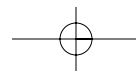
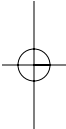
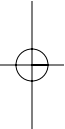
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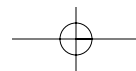
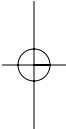
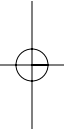
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To Elaine



Brief Contents

Chapter 1. The Evolution of the Microprocessor	1
Chapter 2. Computer Components	37
Chapter 3. Design Planning	71
Chapter 4. Computer Architecture	95
Chapter 5. Microarchitecture	127
Chapter 6. Logic Design	171
Chapter 7. Circuit Design	199
Chapter 8. Layout	239
Chapter 9. Semiconductor Manufacturing	263
Chapter 10. Microprocessor Packaging	303
Chapter 11. Silicon Debug and Test	331
Glossary	357
Index	385



Contents

Preface	xv
Acknowledgments	xix
Chapter 1. The Evolution of the Microprocessor	1
Overview	1
Objectives	1
Introduction	1
The Transistor	3
The Integrated Circuit	10
The Microprocessor	14
Moore's Law	17
Transistor scaling	19
Interconnect scaling	24
Microprocessor scaling	27
The future of Moore's law	30
Conclusion	33
Key Concepts and Terms	34
Review Questions	34
Bibliography	34
Chapter 2. Computer Components	37
Overview	37
Objectives	37
Introduction	37
Bus Standards	38
Chipsets	41
Processor Bus	44
Main Memory	47
Video Adapters (Graphics Cards)	51
Storage Devices	53

x Contents

Expansion Cards	55
Peripheral Bus	57
Motherboards	58
Basic Input Output System	62
Memory Hierarchy	63
Conclusion	69
Key Concepts and Terms	69
Review Questions	69
Bibliography	70
Chapter 3. Design Planning	71
Overview	71
Objectives	71
Introduction	71
Processor Roadmaps	74
Design Types and Design Time	79
Product Cost	85
Conclusion	91
Key Concepts and Terms	92
Review Questions	92
Bibliography	93
Chapter 4. Computer Architecture	95
Overview	95
Objectives	95
Introduction	95
Instructions	98
Computation instructions	99
Data transfer instructions	103
Control flow instructions	111
Instruction Encoding	115
CISC versus RISC	118
RISC versus EPIC	120
Recent x86 extensions	122
Conclusion	124
Key Concepts and Terms	125
Review Questions	125
Bibliography	126
Chapter 5. Microarchitecture	127
Overview	127
Objectives	127
Introduction	128
Pipelining	128
Designing for Performance	134
Measuring Performance	137
Microarchitectural Concepts	142

Contents xi

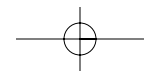
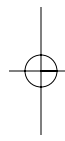
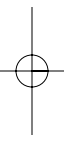
Cache memory	143
Cache coherency	147
Branch prediction	149
Register renaming	152
Microinstructions and microcode	154
Reorder, retire, and replay	157
Life of an Instruction	160
Instruction prefetch	161
L2 cache read	162
Instruction decode	162
Branch prediction	162
Trace cache write	163
Microbranch prediction	163
Uop fetch and drive	163
Allocation	164
Register rename	165
Load instruction queue	165
Schedule and dispatch	165
Register file read	166
Execute and calculate flags	166
Retirement and drive	167
Conclusion	168
Key Concepts and Terms	168
Review Questions	168
Bibliography	169
Chapter 6. Logic Design	171
Overview	171
Objectives	171
Introduction	171
Hardware Description Language	173
Design automation	175
Pre-silicon validation	178
Logic Minimization	182
Combinational logic	182
Sequential logic	191
Conclusion	196
Key Concepts and Terms	197
Review Questions	197
Bibliography	197
Chapter 7. Circuit Design	199
Overview	199
Objectives	199
Introduction	199
MOSFET Behavior	200
CMOS Logic Gates	207
Transistor sizing	212

xii Contents

Sequentials	216
Circuit Checks	220
Timing	221
Noise	226
Power	231
Conclusion	235
Key Concepts and Terms	236
Review Questions	236
Bibliography	237
Chapter 8. Layout	239
Overview	239
Objectives	239
Introduction	239
Creating Layout	240
Layout Density	245
Layout Quality	253
Conclusion	259
Key Concepts and Terms	260
Review Questions	260
Bibliography	261
Chapter 9. Semiconductor Manufacturing	263
Overview	263
Objectives	263
Introduction	263
Wafer Fabrication	265
Layering	268
Doping	268
Deposition	272
Thermal oxidation	276
Planarization	278
Photolithography	279
Masks	280
Wavelength and lithography	282
Etch	286
Example CMOS Process Flow	289
Conclusion	300
Key Concepts and Terms	301
Review Questions	301
Bibliography	302
Chapter 10. Microprocessor Packaging	303
Overview	303
Objectives	303
Introduction	303

Contents **xiii**

Package Hierarchy	304
Package Design Choices	308
Number and configuration of leads	309
Lead types	311
Substrate type	313
Die attach	318
Decoupling capacitors	319
Thermal resistance	320
Multichip modules	323
Example Assembly Flow	325
Conclusion	328
Key Concepts and Terms	329
Review Questions	329
Bibliography	330
Chapter 11. Silicon Debug and Test	331
Overview	331
Objectives	331
Introduction	331
Design for Test Circuits	333
Post-Silicon Validation	338
Validation platforms and tests	339
A bug's life	341
Silicon Debug	344
Silicon Test	350
Conclusion	353
Key Concepts and Terms	354
Review Questions	355
Bibliography	355
Glossary	357
Index	385



Preface

Reading This Book

Microprocessor design isn't hard, but sometimes it seems that way. As processors have grown in complexity and processor design teams have grown in size, individual design engineers have become more specialized, focusing on only one part of the design process. Each step in the design flow has its own jargon; today it is not at all hard to be working on a processor design team and still not have a clear understanding of aspects of design that don't involve you personally. Likewise, most textbooks focus on one particular aspect of processor design, often leaving out information about what steps came before or what will happen afterward. The intent of this book is to provide an overall picture of the microprocessor design flow, from the initial planning of a processor through all the steps required to ship to customers.

Covering the entire design flow in a single book means that only the most important aspects of each step are covered. This book provides the key concepts of processor design and the vocabulary to enable the reader to learn more about each step. Students may use this book to gain a broad knowledge of design and to decide which area they are most interested in pursuing further. Engineers already working in design will find out how their specialty fits into the overall flow. Nonengineers who interact with design teams, such as managers, marketers, or customers, will learn the jargon and concepts being used by the engineers with whom they work.

The flow of the book follows the life of a microprocessor design. The first two chapters cover the concepts required before a design really begins. Chapter 1 discusses transistors and how their evolution drives processor design. Chapter 2 describes some of the other components with which the processor will communicate. Chapter 3 begins the processor design flow with planning, and the following chapters take the design through each of the needed steps to go all the way from an idea to shipping a finished product.

xvi Preface**Chapter list**

Chapter 1—The Evolution of the Microprocessor: Describes the development of the microprocessor and how transistor scaling has driven its evolution.

Chapter 2—Computer Components: Discusses computer components besides the microprocessor and the buses through which they interact with the processor.

Chapter 3—Design Planning: Explains the overall steps required to design a processor and some of the planning required to get started.

Chapter 4—Computer Architecture: Examines trade-offs in choosing an instruction set and how both instructions and data are encoded.

Chapter 5—Microarchitecture: Explains the operation of the different functional areas of a processor and how they determine performance.

Chapter 6—Logic Design: Discusses converting a microarchitectural design into the logic equations required to simulate processor behavior.

Chapter 7—Circuit Design: Shows logic design equations being converted into a transistor implementation.

Chapter 8—Layout: Demonstrates circuit designs being converted to layout drawings of the different layers of material required for fabrication.

Chapter 9—Semiconductor Manufacturing: Shows how integrated circuits are manufactured from layout.

Chapter 10—Microprocessor Packaging: Discusses how completed die are packaged for use and the trade-offs of different types of packages.

Chapter 11—Silicon Debug and Test: Explains how designs are checked for flaws and completed die are tested before shipping to customers.

The many specialized terms and acronyms of processor design are explained as they are introduced in the text, but for reference there is also a glossary at the end of the book. After reading this, microprocessor design won't seem that hard after all.

The Future of Processor Design

The rapid changes in the semiconductor industry make predicting the future of processor design difficult at best, but there are two critical questions designers must address in the coming years.

- How can design make best use of ever-increasing numbers of transistors?
- How can processors be designed to be more power efficient?

The first of these questions has remained the biggest question facing processor designers since the beginning of the industry. By the end of 2006, that is, when this book gets published, the highest transistor count processors on the market should include more than 1 billion devices. If the current rate of increase continues, a 10-billion device processor is likely before 2015 and a 100-billion device processor by 2025. What will these processors be like? The most recent answer for how to make use of more transistors is to put multiple processor cores onto a single die. Does this mean that a 10-billion transistor processor will merely be a combination of ten 1-billion transistor processors? This is certainly possible, but a 100-billion transistor processor will almost certainly not be a hundred core processor. At least today, most software problems cannot be divided into this many separate pieces. Perhaps new methods will be found, but it is likely that the number of cores in future processors will be limited more by software than by hardware.

If most software applications will only be able to make use of a very small number of cores, will each single core contain tens of billions of transistors? Design tools and methods of today are not up to creating the design for such a processor. We may be moving from a time when processors designs are no longer determined by the limits of fabrication, but instead by the limits of the design process itself. Perhaps the processor will absorb the functionality of other computer components, as has happened in the past. A microprocessor with several general-purpose cores as well as a graphics processor, memory controller, and even main memory itself, all built into a single die, could make use of a very large number of transistors indeed. Maybe this type of true “system-on-a-chip” will be the future. In the past, it has always been feared that the end of fabrication improvements was just a few years away. It is physically impossible for the shrinking of transistors to continue at its current pace forever, but every prediction so far of the end of scaling has been wrong. Today, the problems of new hardware and software design methodologies threaten to slow processor improvements before manufacturing limits.

The second critical question of power efficiency has received serious attention from the industry only recently. Early “low-power” processors were simply desktop designs operated at lower voltages and frequencies in order to save power. Only recently has the rapidly growing popularity of portable computing products led to the creation of a number of processor designs intended from conception as low power. Power efficiency has become even more important as high-performance desktops and server processors have reached the limits of cost-effective power delivery and cooling. Suddenly, 100-W server processors and 1-W embedded processors have started to be designed for low power.

The industry has used a number of circuit designs and some fabrication techniques to reduce power, but we have barely scratched the surface of

xviii Preface

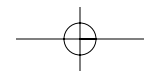
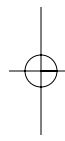
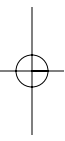
designing power-efficient architectures or microarchitectures. How should things like design validation, test, and packaging change to support power reduction? How should the design of the transistors themselves be altered? These questions are made more complex by a growing need to focus not just on maximum power, but also on average power across a variety of applications. Performance per watt is rapidly becoming more important than simple performance, and our design methods have only just begun to take this into account.

It is not for this book to say what the answers to these questions will be. Instead, time will tell, but a future edition of this book will likely have some of the answers as well as a whole list of new questions. In the meantime, the methods described in this book are the foundation of these future designs. With an understanding of the overall design flow, the reader is ready to ask questions about today's methods, and asking questions is the first step toward finding answers.

Grant McFarland
February, 2006

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Microprocessor Design

