LED ARRAY WITH PHOTODETECTOR

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ABSTRACT
Embodiments of the present invention provide for an array, and corresponding method of forming an array, that includes a plurality of light emitting devices. The light emitting devices are disposed over a substrate, and a photodetector detects light emitted through the substrate from the light emitting devices. Further, a substantially constant brightness may be maintained in a plurality of light emitting devices disposed over the upper surface of a substrate in an array. Light emitted through the substrate from each of the light emitting devices is measured, and the voltage level applied to each of the light emitting devices is varied to maintain a substantially constant brightness level of light emitted from the light emitting devices.

20 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets
FIG. 1
FIG. 3
FIG. 4
FIG. 8
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LED ARRAY WITH PHOTODETECTOR

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/693,022, filed Oct. 23, 2003, which issue as U.S. Pat. No. 8,264,431 on Sep. 11, 2012, which is incorporated by reference as if fully set forth.

FIELD OF INVENTION

The present invention relates to an array of LEDs (light emitting diodes). More specifically, the present invention relates to such an array having LEDs and a photodetector.

BACKGROUND

Arrays may use LEDs within individual pixel elements. Such arrays may be used in flat panel displays. One problem with such displays is that the individual LEDs in the display may degrade at different rates due to different amount of use and other factors. When the difference in luminance efficiency of LEDs within neighboring pixels becomes greater than a certain threshold, such as 5%, the pixel non-uniformity becomes observable, and the display is considered aged.

An aged display as described above may be no longer usable even though all pixels may still be brightly luminescent due to the observable non-uniformities in brightness between pixels. Such differential aging of pixels limits the life of such a display to only a few months, making the displays not commercially viable.

Accordingly, techniques for correction of brightness levels of pixels to compensate for such differential aging in such displays have been developed. For example, the displays may be operated in a constant brightness mode instead of a constant current or voltage mode. The brightness level of each LED pixel may be monitored, and the current level may be adjusted to maintain a constant and uniform brightness for each LED pixel. It has been proposed to monitor the brightness level through the use of photodetectors, which are typically made from silicon technology.

Such photodetectors can be fabricated on a silicon substrate, with the LED layers formed by the photodetectors. This fabrication involves costly processing steps. For example, the metallic layer contacting the LEDs to the photodetector backplane must be transparent so that light can reach the photodetectors. This may reduce the forward quantum efficiency of the photodetectors by as much as 50%. Further, a distinct photodetector must be fabricated to support each LED, since the distance between the LED layers and the photodetectors will be submicron scale. Also, with such an approach, the photodetector circuitry will have to share the precious area on the substrate with active device drivers that also occupy space on the silicon backplane.

SUMMARY

Embodiments of the present invention provide for an array, and corresponding method of forming an array, that includes a plurality of light emitting devices. The light emitting devices are disposed over a substrate, and a photodetector detects light emitted through the substrate from the light emitting devices.

Embodiments of the present invention provide for a method for maintaining a substantially constant brightness in a plurality of light emitting devices disposed over the upper surface of a substrate in an array. The method measures light emitted through the substrate from each of the light emitting devices, and varying the voltage level applied to each of the light emitting devices to maintain a substantially constant brightness level of light emitted from the light emitting devices.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a diagram of an LED mounted on a substrate.
FIG. 2 is a diagram of an array of LEDs.
FIG. 3 is a diagram of an embodiment of the present invention.
FIG. 4 is a diagram of an embodiment of the present invention.
FIG. 5 is a diagram illustrating an array in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.
FIG. 6 is a diagram illustrating an array in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.
FIG. 7 is a diagram illustrating an array in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.
FIG. 8 is a diagram illustrating a compensation generator circuit in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Embodiments of the present invention provide for an array, a method of forming an array, and a method for maintaining a substantially constant brightness in a plurality of light emitting devices disposed over the upper surface of a substrate in an array.

FIG. 1 illustrates an LED 100 formed on a transparent substrate 110. The substrate 110 may be a standard substrate or a flexible substrate. The LED may be any type of LED, such as an organic light emitting diode (OLED), a polymer light emitting diode (PLED), or a quantum dot light emitting diode (QDLED), for example. An OLED is shown in FIG. 1 as an example. The LED may include ITO (indium tin oxide) layer 120, metal layer 150, and sandwiched there between are HTL (hole transport layer) 130, an ETL (electron transport layer) 140. A voltage applied between the ITO layer 120 and the metal layer 150 causes current to flow there between, and the LED generates electroluminescent light, which is emitted through the transparent substrate 110. A portion of the light is waveguided in the substrate 110, and is emitted from edges of the substrate 110. The present invention measures the light emitted through the substrate, as further described below.

FIG. 2 illustrates an array 200 that may be used in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. The array 200 includes a plurality of LEDs, such as representative LED 220, that are formed over a substrate 210. The array may be used to form a display, where individual LEDs are selectively activated to form images. The arrays illustrate herein are passive matrix arrays, but the invention is equally applicable to active matrix arrays. The array 200 may include additional elements, as further described below.

FIG. 3 illustrates an LED 300 formed over a transparent substrate 310 in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. An OLED is shown as a type of LED that may be used. The LED includes HTL 330 and ETL 340 sandwiched between ITO layer 320 and metal layer 350. This embodiment uses photodetector 360 mounted on a side surface of the substrate 310, to measure light emitted through the substrate. The quantity of light measured is used to generate a compensation factor used to compensate for aging of the LED. As the LED ages and hence emits a lower quantity of light, the
compensation factor is used to increase the voltage (and the current) applied to the LED to maintain a substantially constant brightness, as further explained below.

FIG. 4 illustrates an LED 400 formed over a transparent substrate 410 in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. An OLED is shown as one type of LED that may be used. The LED includes HTL 430 and ETL 440 sandwiched between ITO layer 420 and metal layer 450. This embodiment uses photodetector 460 mounted on a lower surface of the substrate 410, to measure light emitted through the substrate. The photodetector 460 is not disposed directly below the LED where the surface emitted EL light emerges, but is instead disposed along an outer periphery edge of the substrate 410. Like the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 3, the photodetector 460 measures a quantity of light that is waveguided through the substrate 410. As an alternative to the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 4, the photodetector could be placed on an upper surface of the substrate 410, along the outer periphery edge of substrate 410.

FIG. 5 illustrates an array 500 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The array 500 includes a substrate 510 having LEDs (not shown in this view) formed over the substrate. Any desired number of LEDs may be used in the array, and the number used may be set depending on desired resolution and cost, for example. The array also includes photodetectors 520 disposed along edge surfaces 530 of the substrate 510. The edge surfaces may be substantially perpendicular to the upper surface of the substrate. The embodiment illustrated in FIG. 5 includes twenty-eight photodetectors, with 7 along each of the four edge surfaces 530. More or less photodetectors 520 may be used. The more photodetectors 520 that are used, the quicker that the array may determine calibration factors for each LED in the array 500, as further explained below.

FIG. 6 illustrates an embodiment of an array 600 in accordance with the present invention. In this embodiment, the photodetectors 610 are formed along an outer periphery edge 620 of the array 600. The outer periphery edge 620 will generally be a non-display area so as not to interfere with items that may be displayed by the LEDs. The embodiment shown in FIG. 6 illustrates twenty eight photodetectors 610, but again any number of photodetectors 610 may be used.

A plurality of photodetectors 750 may be placed in various positions on the substrate 710 where there may measure the light waveguided in the substrate, such as on an outer periphery of the upper or lower surface of the substrate 710, or on an edge surface or edge surfaces of the substrate 710. The photodetectors 750 feed the measured light to a feedback or compensation factor generator circuit 760, which will be further explained below in connection with FIG. 8.

The compensation factor generator 760 compares measured light values of individual LEDs to a reference value. If the measured value is different from the reference value, a compensation factor may be generated and stored in memory array 780, where it may be applied to individual LEDs by feedback to the column drivers 740.

When the array is initially calibrated, which may occur in a factory, an external camera may be used to measure brightness values for each LED. The current value needed to generate a reference brightness value, for example 100 photons, is recorded, and this may be done for each LED in the array. Additionally, for a particular photodetector, a measurement may be made as to how many of the photons are waveguided through the substrate to the photodetector. For example, if 1 milliamp of current is needed to generate 100 photons as measured by the camera, 2 photons may be measured by a particular photodetector.

When a calibration occurs at a later time, 1 milliamp of current is again applied to the particular LED as a reference, and the photodetector measures a brightness of the LED. If less than 2 photons is measured, the compensation factor can be used to adjust the voltage (and current) applied to the LED, and then a further measurement may be made by the photodetector. The voltage may then be readjusted, and this process may continue until the proper brightness is measured at the photodetector, as further described below.

FIG. 8 illustrates a compensation factor generator circuit 800 and photodetector 830 that may be used in conjunction with the present invention. This is only one possible compensation factor generator circuit that may be used, and those of skill in the art would be able to develop alternative circuit that would work with the present invention.

The photodetector 830 includes a photodiode 820 that detects light emitted form the LED 810 through the substrate of the array. The measured light value may be fed to comparator 840, which may compare the measured value to a reference value. If the measured value is different from the reference value, the output of the comparator will change the optical output of the LED to compensation for the difference by applying a different voltage across the LED. This correction may be sufficient, but alternatively this compensation process may be repeated at achieve a more precise correction. The photodetector can read the light value of the LED again to readjust the output of the comparator and this process may continue until the input to the comparator from the photodetector matches the reference value. At this point, the compensation factor may be sent to the memory for storage and use when the array is operating.

The compensation factor may be applied to the corresponding LED upon selection of the particular column and row electrodes, so that the voltage applied across the electrodes is changed to compensate for the aging or other changes in performance of the LED, and to maintain a desired brightness of the LEDs.

When the array is used to generate the compensation factors, the array may activate a single LED, make a light measurement and calculate a compensation factor for the LED, and then repeat this process for each LED in the array until all of the compensation factors are calculated. Using this method, if the array has 1024x800 LEDs, 1024x800 separate measurements would be made.
As explained above, the present invention may use one photodetector or a plurality of photodetectors to measure light emitted and waveguided through the substrate. The more photodetectors that are used, the faster the compensation factors for all LEDs in the array may be calculated. As an alternative to calculating compensation factors for one LED at a time as explained above, if twenty-eight photodetectors are used, then twenty-eight compensation factors for twenty-eight LEDs may be calculated simultaneously. In this way, the present invention would allow twenty-eight compensation factors to be calculated simultaneously taking approximately 10 microseconds per one LED. For a standard display having 1,024x800 pixel LEDs, all of the compensation factors could be calculated in approximately 0.3 seconds.

The present invention could be used in a display that calculates new compensation factors every time the display is turned on, at predetermined time intervals, or when selected by a user. A problem that could be encountered is that external light could interfere with the compensation process, but this should only be a factor if the external light is extremely bright. In such a case, the array could be covered or closed during calibration.

Several embodiments of the invention are specifically illustrated and/or described herein. However, it will be appreciated that modifications and variations on the invention are covered by the above teachings and within the purview of the appended claims without departing from the spirit and intended scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An array, comprising:
   a plurality of light emitting devices disposed on an upper
   surface of a transparent substrate,
   wherein each of the plurality of light emitting devices is
   individually addressed to display an image; and
   at least one photodetector non-removably flush mounted
   on an external face of a side surface of the transparent
   substrate for detecting a fraction of waveguided light
   emitted from the plurality of light emitting devices,
   wherein the side surface being substantially perpendicular
   to the upper surface, and
   wherein some fraction of waveguided light is observable.

2. The array of claim 1, further comprising at least one
   additional photodetector formed on a lower surface of the
   transparent substrate for detecting another fraction of
   waveguided light emitted from the plurality of light emitting
   devices.

3. The array of claim 1, further comprising at least one
   additional photodetector formed on an outer periphery edge
   of the upper surface for detecting another fraction of
   waveguided light emitted from the plurality of light emitting
   devices.

4. The array of claim 1, further comprising a feedback
   circuit that measures a brightness level for each of the plurality
   of light emitting devices, and varies a voltage applied to
   individual ones of the light emitting devices to maintain a
   brightness level of each of the plurality of light emitting
   devices at a substantially constant level.

5. The array of claim 4, wherein the feedback circuit
   includes a compensation factor generator for generating a
   compensation factor for each of the plurality of light emitting
   devices and a memory array for storing the compensation
   factor for each of the plurality of light emitting devices.

6. A display comprising the array of claim 1.

7. The array of claim 1, wherein the at least one light
   emitting device is one of an organic light emitting device, a
   polymer light emitting device or a quantum dot light emitting
   device.

8. The array of claim 1, wherein each of the plurality
   of light emitting devices is selectively activated to display the
   image.

9. An array, comprising:
   a plurality of light emitting devices disposed on an upper
   surface of a transparent substrate,
   wherein each of the plurality of light emitting devices is
   individually addressed to display an image; and
   at least one photodetector non-removably flush mounted
   on an external face of a side surface of the transparent
   substrate for detecting a fraction of waveguided light emitted
   from the plurality of light emitting devices, wherein
   some fraction of waveguided light is observable.

10. The array of claim 9, further comprising at least one
    additional photodetector formed on an external face of
    another side surface of the transparent substrate for detecting
    another fraction of waveguided light emitted from the plurality
    of light emitting devices.

11. The array of claim 10, wherein the side surface and the
    another side surface is a lower surface.

12. The array of claim 10, wherein the side surface and the
    another side surface is at least two of a lower surface, an
    upper surface or a side surface.

13. The array of claim 9, wherein the side surface is a side
    surface.

14. The array of claim 9, further comprising a feedback
    circuit that measures a brightness level for each of the plurality
    of light emitting devices, and varies a voltage applied to
    individual ones of the light emitting devices to maintain a
    brightness level of each of the plurality of light emitting
    devices at a substantially constant level.

15. The array of claim 14, wherein the feedback circuit
    includes a compensation factor generator for generating a
    compensation factor for each of the plurality of light emitting
    devices and a memory array for storing the compensation
    factor for each of the plurality of light emitting devices.

16. A display comprising the array of claim 9.

17. The array of claim 9, wherein the at least one light
    emitting device is one of an organic light emitting device, a
    polymer light emitting device or a quantum dot light emitting
    device.

18. The array of claim 9, wherein each of the plurality
    of light emitting devices is selectively activated to display the
    image.

19. A method for forming an array, comprising:
    forming a plurality of light emitting devices disposed on an
    upper surface of a transparent substrate, wherein each of
    the plurality of light emitting devices is individually
    addressed to display an image; and
    non-removably mounting at least one photodetector on a
    surface of the transparent substrate for detecting a fraction
    of waveguided light emitted through the transparent
    substrate, wherein a detector side of the at least one
    photodetector faces the plurality of light emitting
    devices, and wherein some fraction of waveguided light
    is observable.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising:
    forming at least one additional photodetector on another
    surface of the transparent substrate for detecting another
    fraction of waveguided light emitted from the plurality
    of light emitting devices, wherein the side surface and the
    another surface is at least two of a lower surface, an
    upper surface or a side surface.