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Cann

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(54) **LOW PHASE NOISE
VOLTAGE-CONTROLLED OSCILLATOR
AND METHOD OF USING THE SAME**

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(75) Inventor: **Michael John Cann**, Lower Hutt (NZ)

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(73) Assignee: **Digital Microwave Corporation**, San Jose, CA (US)

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(21) Appl. No.: **09/859,837**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **H03B 5/18**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **331/117 D**; 331/96; 331/99;
331/107 DP; 331/107 SL; 331/117 R; 331/177 V;
333/235

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—James S. Hsue; Skjerven Morrill LLP

(58) **Field of Search** 331/36 C, 96,
331/99, 100, 107 A, 107 DP, 107 SL, 117 R,
117 FE, 117 D, 177 R, 177 V; 333/235

(57) **ABSTRACT**

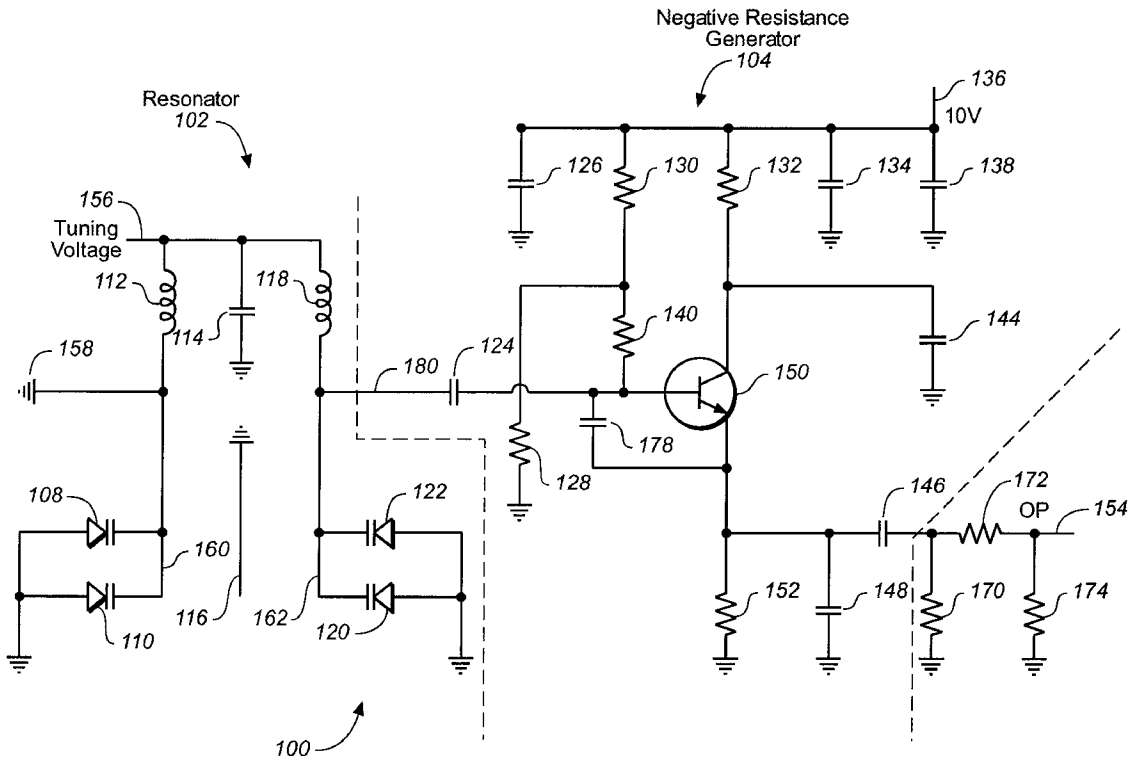
A low phase noise voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) and method are provided. The VCO comprises a negative resistance generator and a resonator that reduces VCO phase noise.

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22 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



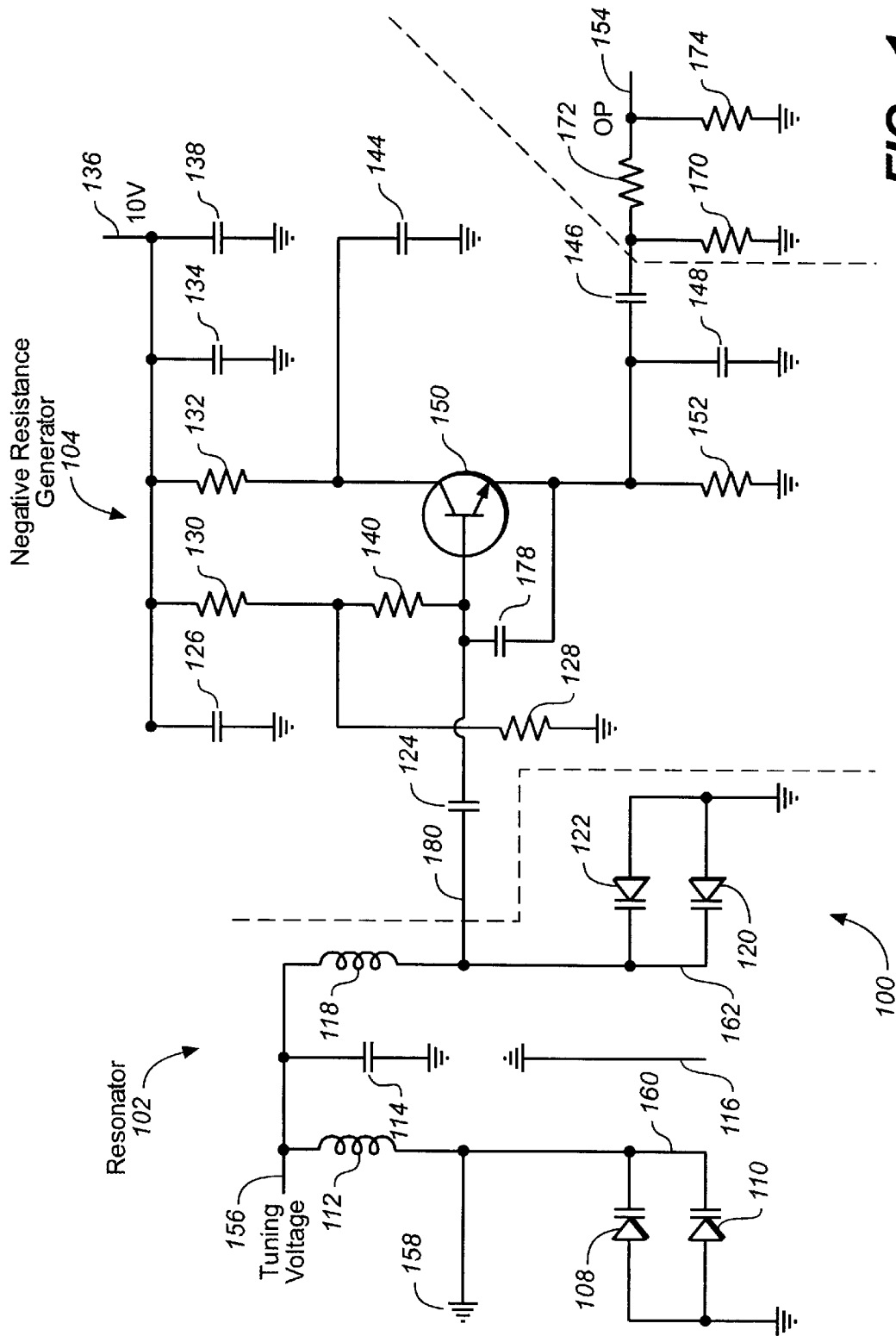


FIG. 1

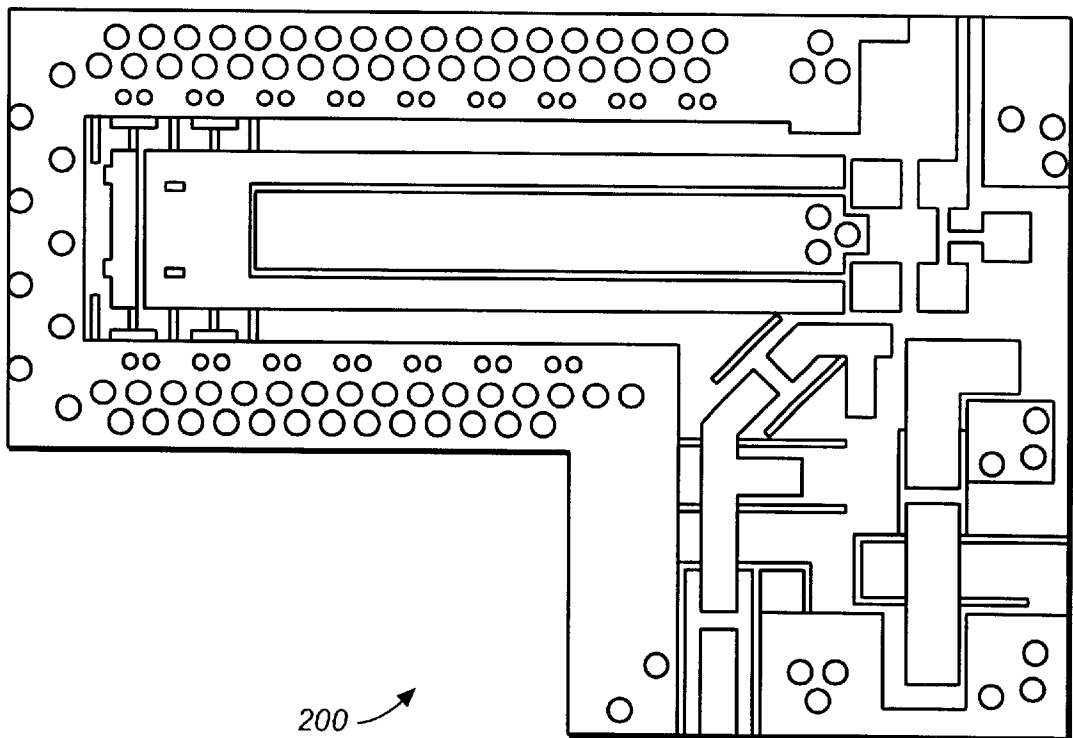


FIG. 2

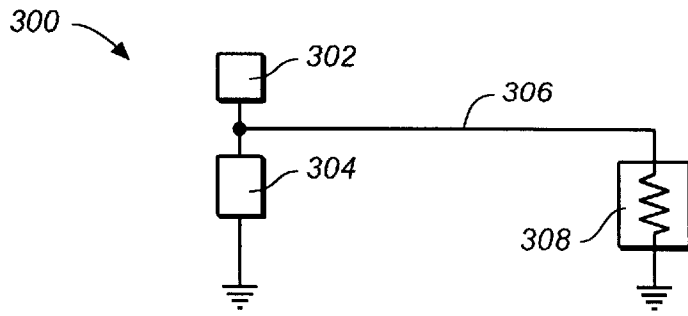


FIG._3A

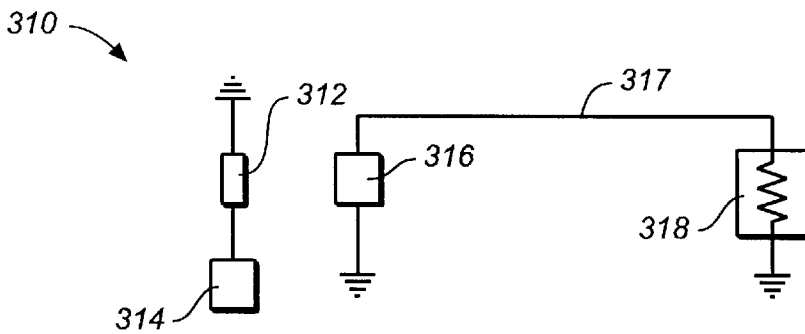


FIG._3B

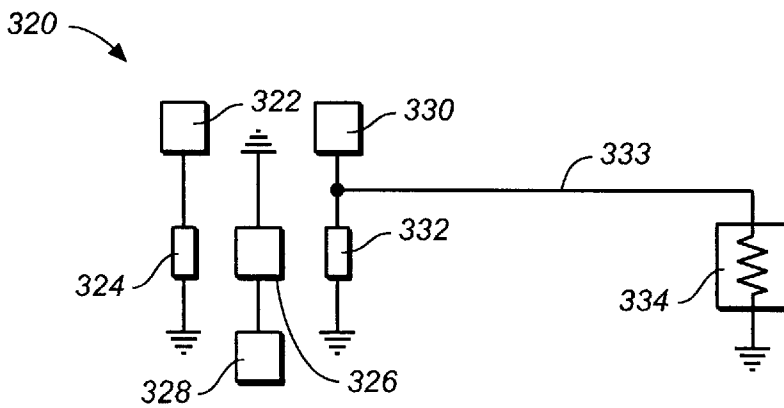


FIG._3C

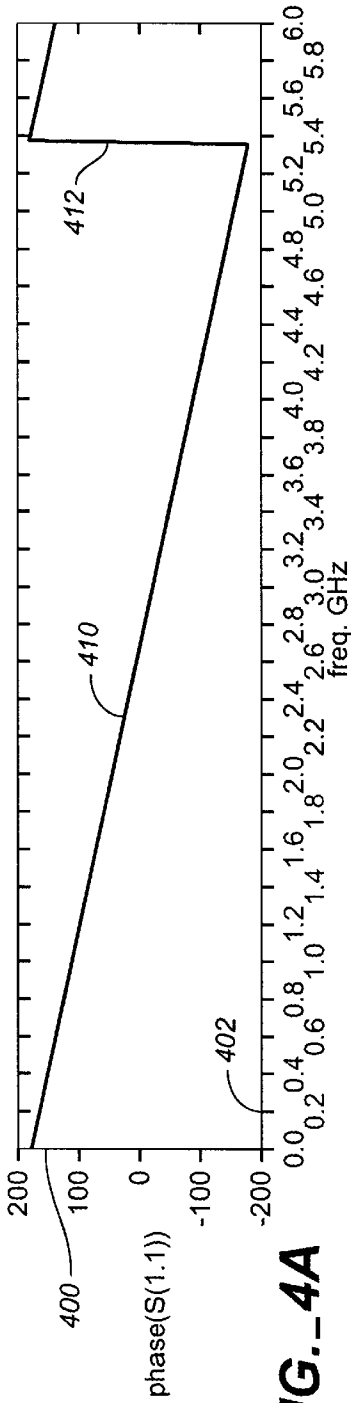


FIG. 4A

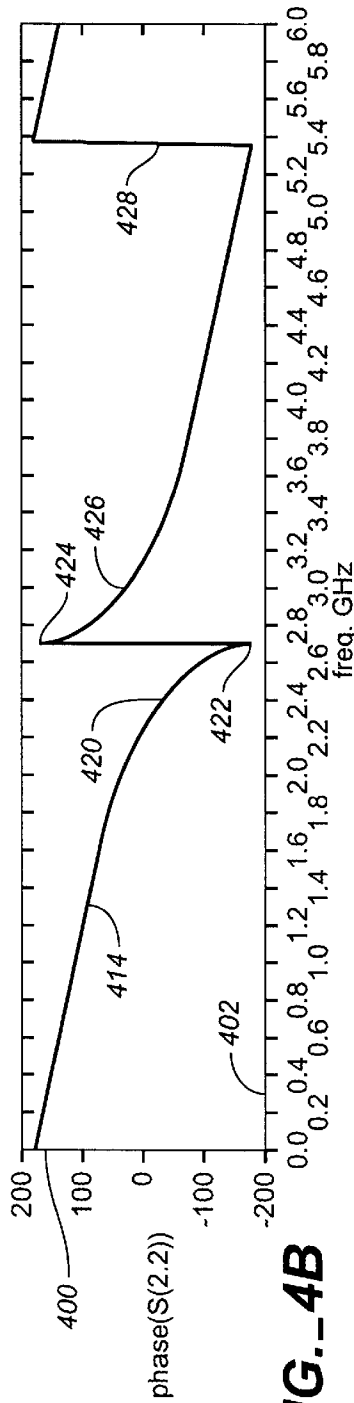


FIG. 4B

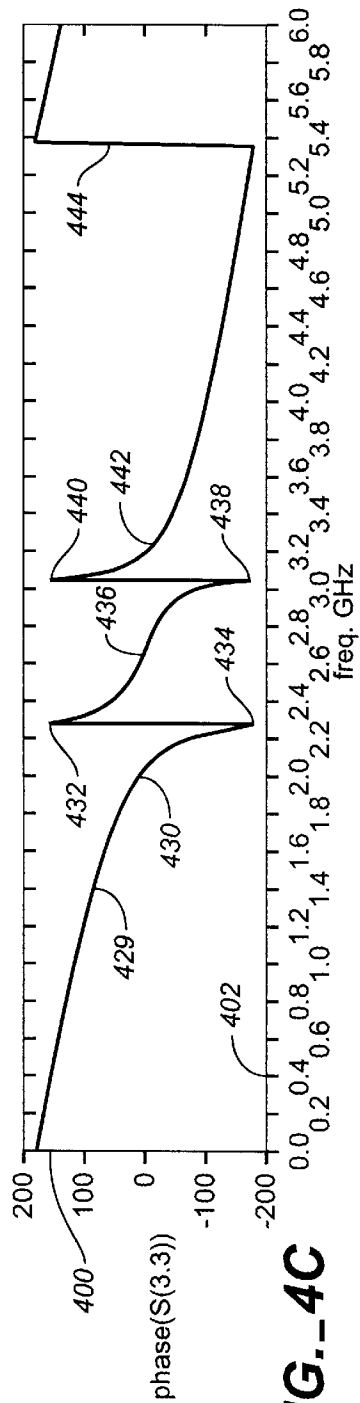
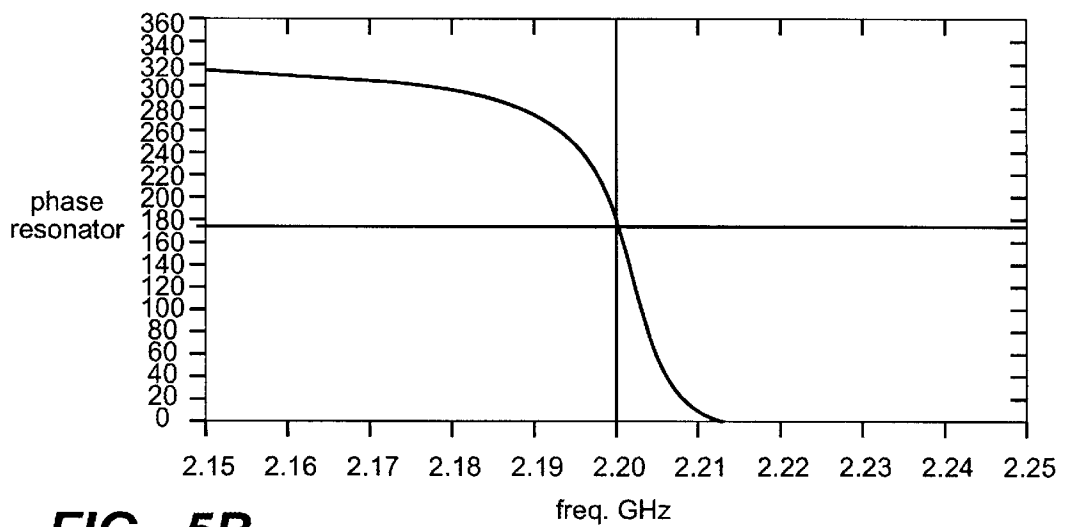
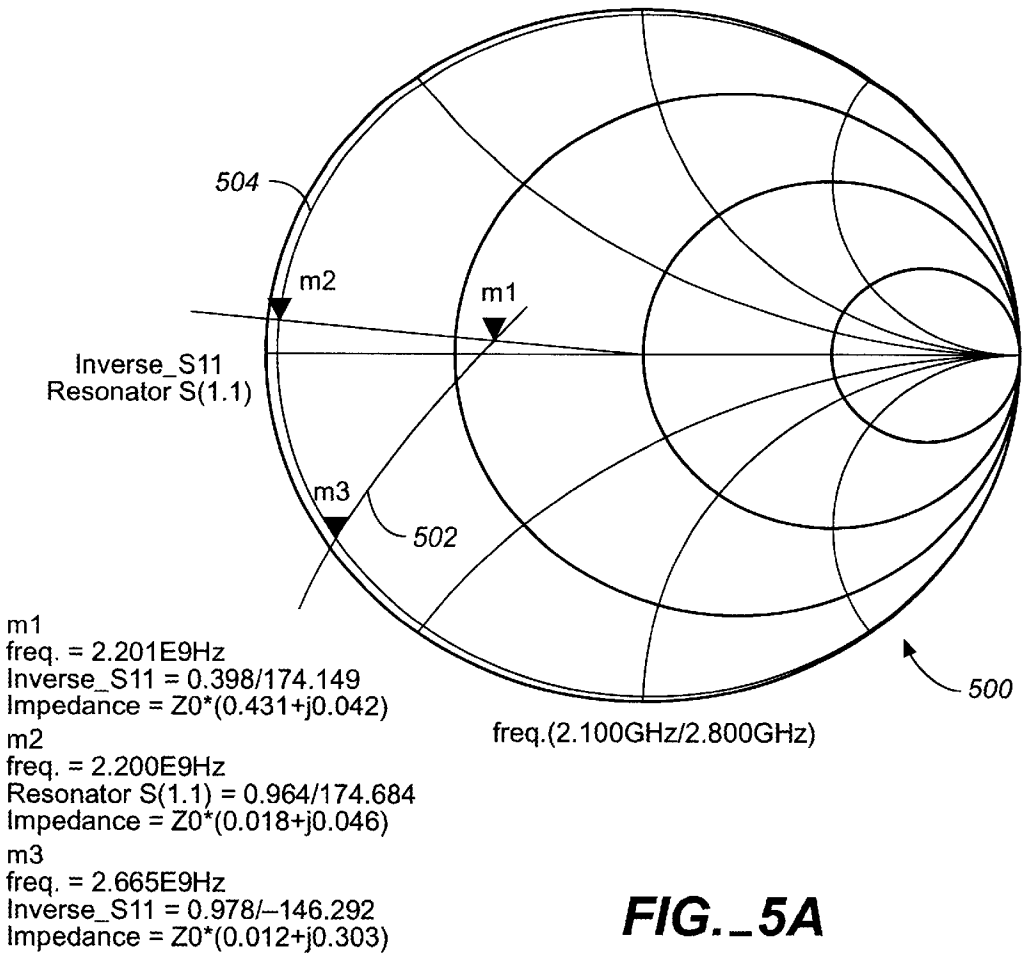


FIG. 4C



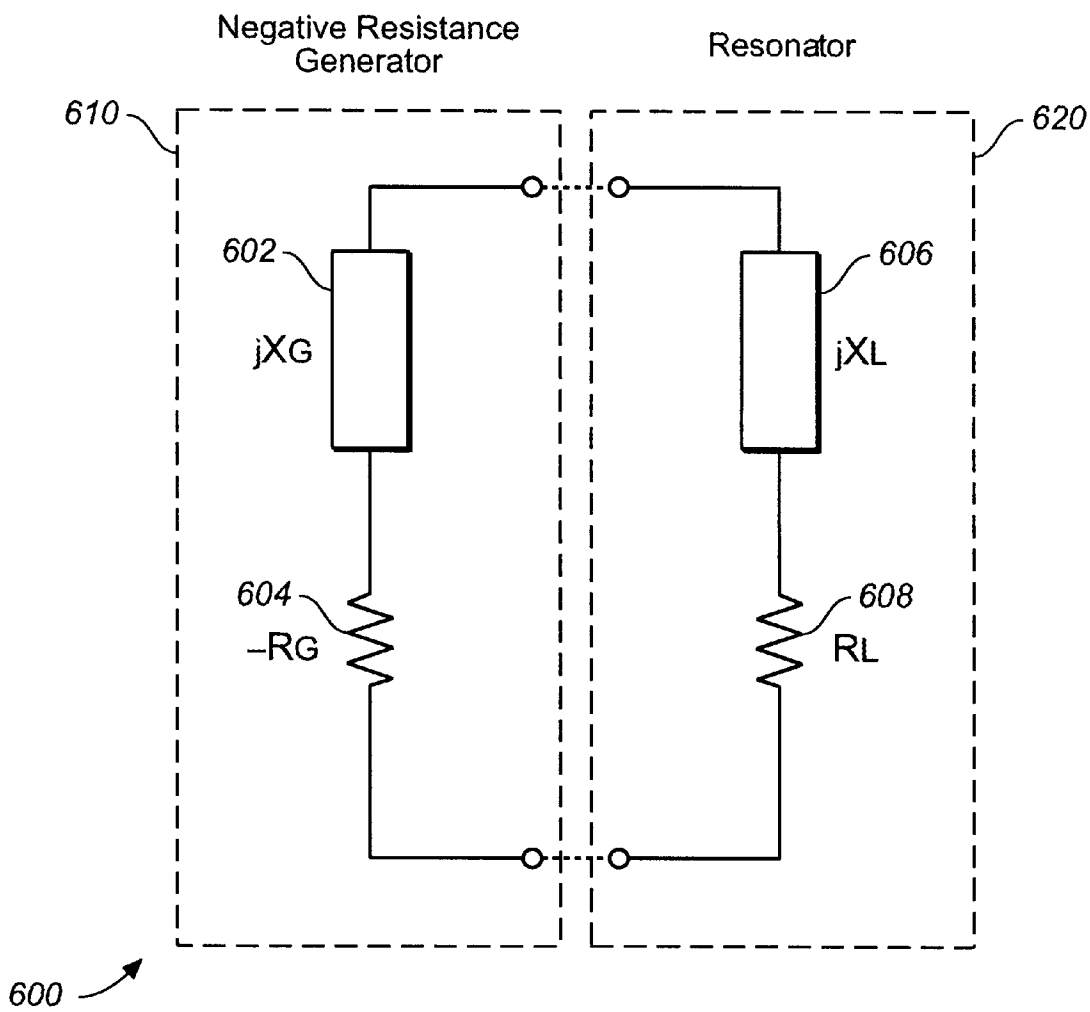


FIG._6

LOW PHASE NOISE VOLTAGE-CONTROLLED OSCILLATOR AND METHOD OF USING THE SAME

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to electronic circuits, and more particularly a voltage-controlled oscillator.

2. Description of the Related Art

Wireless communication needs worldwide have increased dramatically in the last few years, particularly in the amount of devices being used and the demand for higher data rates. The amount of available radiofrequency (RF) spectrum is limited, and the result has been an incredible increase in the licensing costs for specific frequency bands. The limited frequency spectrum has prompted telecommunication equipment manufacturers to either decrease the amount of bandwidth required for a specific data rate or to increase the data rate while staying within a specified bandwidth.

The highest data rate that a RF communication system can handle is generally determined by the type of modulation scheme used by the communication system. One of the most spectrally-efficient modulation schemes currently available is Quadrature Amplitude Modulation (QAM). There are many parameters in a RF system that can limit the order of QAM used. One of the main parameters is 'phase noise.' A high proportion of phase noise is generated by local oscillators (LOs) used in frequency conversion in a RF system. Many local oscillators use a voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) within a phase locked loop (PLL) to generate a highly stable local oscillation with low phase noise.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A low phase noise voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) is provided in accordance with the present invention. In one embodiment, the VCO comprises a negative resistance generator and a resonator structure that reduces VCO phase noise. The VCO uses the reflection properties of the resonator.

An advantage of one embodiment of the VCO is its relatively low cost of manufacture compared to other VCOs. Another advantage of one embodiment of the VCO is its high performance capability.

Another advantage of one embodiment of the VCO is its lower phase noise compared to conventional microstrip resonators. In one embodiment, low phase noise performance is achieved by tuning the outside fingers of an interdigital filter resonator in the VCO and configuring suitable physical dimensions of the resonator.

One aspect of the invention relates to a voltage-controlled oscillator comprising a resonator and a negative resistance generator. The resonator comprises a three-finger interdigital filter and a plurality of varactors. A first varactor is coupled to a first finger of the interdigital filter and a ground terminal. A second varactor is coupled to a third finger of the interdigital filter and a ground terminal. A second finger of the interdigital filter is coupled to a ground terminal. The first and second varactors are configured to alter a resonant frequency of the interdigital filter to a desired frequency in response to a tuning voltage applied to the resonator.

The negative resistance generator is coupled to the resonator. The negative resistance generator is configured to receive a first signal with a particular frequency from the resonator. The negative resistance generator is configured to

output a second signal with a substantially similar frequency and a higher amplitude compared to the first signal.

Another aspect of the invention relates to a method of generating an oscillating signal at a desired frequency. The method comprises applying a tuning voltage to a resonator. The resonator comprises an interdigital filter and a plurality of varactors. The interdigital filter comprises a first finger, a second finger and a third finger. The first finger is coupled to a first varactor, and the third finger is coupled to a second varactor. The method further comprises using the tuning voltage to alter a resonant frequency of the interdigital filter to generate a signal with a desired oscillation frequency.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates one embodiment of a voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO).

FIG. 2 illustrates one embodiment of a circuit layout of the VCO of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3A illustrates an Advanced Design System (ADS) schematic of one embodiment of a single quarter-wave resonator network.

FIG. 3B illustrates an ADS schematic of one embodiment of a two-finger interdigital filter network.

FIG. 3C illustrates an ADS schematic of one embodiment of a three-finger interdigital filter network.

FIG. 4A illustrates a phase difference between injected and reflected signals (a reflected-signal phase response) of one embodiment of the single quarter-wave resonator network of FIG. 3A.

FIG. 4B illustrates a phase difference between injected and reflected signals (a reflected-signal phase response) of one embodiment of the two-finger interdigital filter network of FIG. 3B.

FIG. 4C illustrates a phase difference between injected and reflected signals (a reflected-signal phase response) of one embodiment of the three-finger interdigital filter network of FIG. 3C.

FIG. 5A illustrates an example of a Smith chart with a S_{11} response plot of the resonator in FIG. 1 and a S_{11} response plot of the negative resistance generator in FIG. 1.

FIG. 5B illustrates a phase response of one embodiment of the resonator in FIG. 1 plotted with respect to oscillation frequency.

FIG. 6 illustrates a simplified diagram of the resonator and the negative resistance generator of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 illustrates one embodiment of a voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) **100**.

The VCO **100** of FIG. 1 comprises a resonator **102** and a negative resistance generator **104**. In general, a resonator is a device that has been configured to provide oscillation at a particular frequency or range of frequencies.

Resonator

Structurally, the resonator **102** in FIG. 1 comprises a first inductor **112**, a first capacitor **114**, a second inductor **118**, a first voltage-variable capacitor (varactor) diode **108**, a second varactor diode **110**, a first interdigital filter finger **160**, a second interdigital filter finger **116**, a third interdigital filter finger **162**, a third varactor diode **122** and a fourth varactor diode **120**. The first, second and third interdigital filter fingers **160**, **116**, **162** function as an interdigital filter.

In one embodiment, the first inductor **112** comprises a 22-nanohenry (nH) Coilcraft 0805HS Series inductor, the

first capacitor **114** comprises a 10-picofarad (pF) ATC600S capacitor, and the second inductor **118** comprises a 22-nH Coilcraft 0805HS Series inductor.

In one embodiment, the first, second, third and fourth varactor diodes **108**, **110**, **122**, **120** in FIG. 1 comprise silicon varactor diodes. In another embodiment, the first, second, third and fourth varactor diodes **108**, **110**, **122**, **120** comprise GaAs varactor diodes. In one embodiment, the first, second, third and fourth varactor diodes **108**, **110**, **122**, **120** comprise Toshiba 1SV285 varactor diodes.

In one embodiment, the first interdigital filter finger **160** in FIG. 1 comprises a 1.2 mm×21 mm microstrip 50 ohm track, the second interdigital filter finger **116** comprises a 2.5 mm×21 mm microstrip 30 ohm track, and the third interdigital filter finger **162** comprises a 1.2 mm×21 mm microstrip 50 ohm track. In another embodiment, the length of the first and third interdigital filter fingers is 21.3 mm. In one embodiment, the three interdigital filter fingers **160**, **116**, **162** are separated by a spacing of 0.18 mm. In other embodiments, the resonator **102** may comprise interdigital filter fingers with other dimensions and spacings. In one embodiment, all microstrip tracks are implemented on a 0.5 mm teflon substrate. The interdigital filter fingers **160**, **116**, and **162** are used to determine the frequency of the oscillator **100**.

In FIG. 1, the second varactor diode **110** is coupled to an end of the first interdigital filter finger **160** and a ground terminal, and the fourth varactor diode **120** is coupled to an end of the third interdigital filter finger **162** and a ground terminal. The first and third varactor diodes **108**, **122** are coupled to the first and third interdigital filter fingers **160**, **162**, respectively, and ground terminals. The configuration of some or all of the varactor diodes **108**, **110**, **122**, **120** between the first and third interdigital filter fingers **160**, **162** and ground allows the first and third interdigital filter fingers **160**, **162** to be tuned. This configuration also removes the need for additional RF bypassing and decoupling circuitry.

The open-circuit ends of the first and third interdigital filter fingers **160**, **162** are coupled to the first and second inductors **112**, **118**, which act as radiofrequency (RF) chokes. In general, a RF choke is a low-inductance coil used to block RF alternating currents. The first and second inductors **112**, **118** are both RF decoupled with the first capacitor **114**.

In operation, a tuning voltage in the range of about 0V to about 6V is applied across the first inductor **112** at points **156**, **158** of the resonator **102**. The first and second inductors **112**, **118** apply the same tuning voltage to the two outside interdigital filter fingers **160**, **162** and the four varactor diodes **108**, **110**, **122**, **120**. The capacitance of each varactor **108**, **110**, **120**, **122** is set by the tuning voltage. The capacitance alters the resonant frequency of the interdigital filter, which comprises the three fingers **160**, **116**, **162**. The tuning voltage is used to adjust the frequency of an output signal at a point **154** in the negative resistance generator **104** (described below).

The interdigital filter fingers **160**, **116** and **162** are a key to achieving low phase noise performance. In one embodiment, low phase noise performance is achieved by (1) tuning the varactor diodes **108**, **110** by applying a tuning voltage in the range of about 0V to about 6V to the first and third interdigital filter fingers **160**, **162** and (2) configuring suitable physical dimensions of the resonator **102**. In one embodiment, a tuning range of about 380 MHz is achieved.

FIG. 2 illustrates one embodiment of a circuit layout **200** of the VCO **100** of FIG. 1. In one embodiment, the circuit

200 comprises a microstrip circuit that is etched on a 0.5 mm-thick, double-sided, teflon laminate. The resonator **102** of FIG. 1 may be observed as a one-port network, such as the networks **300**, **310**, **320** in FIGS. 3A-3C.

FIG. 3A illustrates an Advanced Design System (ADS) schematic of one embodiment of a single quarter-wave resonator network **300**. ADS is a software circuit design suite produced by Agilent. The single quarter-wave resonator network **300** in FIG. 3A comprises a first element **302**, a second element **304**, a line **306** and a third element **308**. In one embodiment, the first element **302** comprises a microstrip open-circuit line (Model of a Microstrip Line with one end Open-Circuit (MLOC)) with a width W of 1.2 mm and a negligible length, such as 1×10^{-3} mm. In one configuration, the first element **302** is associated with a Transmission Line reference number **8** (TL8).

In one embodiment, the second element **304** in FIG. 3A comprises a microstrip line (Model of a Microstrip Line (MLIN)) with a width W of 1.2 mm and a length L of 21.3 mm. In one configuration, the second element **304** is associated with a Transmission Line reference number **7** (TL7). The line **306** comprises a connection line with no significant physical dimensions.

In one embodiment, the third element **308** comprises a load impedance that mimics the effect of a 50-ohm input port of a measurement instrument, such as a network analyzer. In one configuration, the third element **308** is associated with a Termination Model Reference Number **1** (TERM1) with a Port Number **1** for S-parameter measurement (NUM=1).

In operation, the third element **308** in FIG. 3A injects a low-level signal at a specific frequency to the first and second elements **302**, **304** via line **306**. When the network **300** created by the first and second elements **302** and **304** receives the signal, a certain amount of the signal is reflected back to the third element **308** via line **306**. The third element **308** measures the reflected signal. This process is performed for a certain amount of discrete frequencies within a specified frequency range, such as 0 to 6 GHz. The difference in phase between the injected and reflected signals is shown in FIG. 4A.

FIG. 3B illustrates an ADS schematic of one embodiment of a two-finger interdigital filter network **310**. The interdigital filter network **310** in FIG. 3B comprises a first element **312**, a second element **314**, a third element **316**, a line **317** and a fourth element **318**. In one embodiment, the first and third elements **312**, **316** in FIG. 3B comprise parts of a Microstrip Asymmetric Coupled Lines (MACLIN) model, which comprises two microstrip tracks of widths $W1$ and $W2$, respectively, a length L , and separated by a spacing S . In one embodiment, $W1$ is equal to 1.2 mm, $W2$ is equal to 1.2 mm, S is equal to 0.18 mm, and L is equal to 21.3 mm. In one configuration, the first and third elements **312**, **316** are associated with a MACLIN reference designator of CLIN2.

In one embodiment, the second element **314** in FIG. 3B comprises a MLOC with a width W of 1.2 mm and a negligible length, such as 1×10^{-3} mm. In one configuration, the second element **314** is associated with a Transmission Line reference number **9** (TL9). The line **317** comprises a connection line with no significant physical dimensions.

In one embodiment, the fourth element **318** in FIG. 3B comprises a load impedance that mimics the effect of a 50-ohm input port of a measurement instrument, such as a network analyzer. In one configuration, the fourth element **318** is associated with a Termination Model Reference Number **2** (TERM2) with a Port Number **2** for S-parameter measurement (NUM=2).

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In operation, the fourth element **318** injects a low-level signal at a specific frequency to the third element **316** via line **317**. When the network created by the first, second and third elements **312**, **314**, **316** receives the signal, a certain amount of the signal is reflected back to the fourth element **318** via line **317**. The fourth element **318** measures the reflected signal. This process is performed for a certain amount of discrete frequencies within a specified frequency range, such as 0 to 6 GHz. The difference in phase between the injected and reflected signals is shown in FIG. 4B.

FIG. 3C illustrates an ADS schematic of one embodiment of a three-finger interdigital filter network **320**. The interdigital filter network **320** in FIG. 3C comprises a first element **322**, a second element **324**, a third element **326**, a fourth element **328**, a fifth element **330**, a sixth element **332**, a line **333** and a seventh element **334**.

In one embodiment, the first, fourth and fifth elements **322**, **328**, **330** in FIG. 3C each comprise a MLOC with a width W of 1.2 mm and a negligible length, such as 1×10^{-3} mm. In one configuration, the first with Transmission Line reference numbers **2**, **6** and **5** (TL2, TL6 and TL5), respectively.

In one embodiment, the second, third and sixth elements **324**, **326**, **332** in FIG. 3C comprise parts of a MACLIN model, which comprises three microstrip tracks of widths W1, W2, and W3, respectively, and a length L. The second and third elements **324**, **326** are separated by a first spacing S1. The third and sixth elements **326**, **332** are separated by a second spacing S2. In one embodiment, W1 and W3 are each equal to 1.2 mm, W2 is equal to 2.5 mm, S1 and S2 are each equal to 0.18 mm, and L is equal to 21.3 mm. In other embodiments, W1 and W3 may not be equal and/or S1 and S may not be equal. In one configuration, the second, third and sixth elements **324**, **326**, **332** are associated with a MACLIN reference designator of MACLIN3. The line **333** comprises a connection line with no significant physical dimensions.

In one embodiment, the seventh element **334** in FIG. 3C comprises a load impedance that mimics the effect of a 50-ohm input port of a measurement instrument, such as a network analyzer. In one configuration, the seventh element **334** is associated with a Termination Model Reference Number **3** (TERM3) with a Port Number **3** for S-parameter measurement (NUM=3).

In operation, the seventh element **334** injects a low-level signal at a specific frequency to the fifth and sixth elements **330**, **332** via line **333**. When the network created by the first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth elements **322**, **324**, **326**, **328**, **330**, **332** receives the signal, a certain amount of the signal is reflected back to the seventh element **334** via line **333**. The seventh element **334** measures the reflected signal. This process is performed for a certain amount of discrete frequencies within a specified frequency range, such as 0 to 6 GHz. The difference in phase between the injected and reflected signals is shown in FIG. 4C.

FIG. 4A illustrates a phase difference between injected and reflected signals (a reflected-signal phase response) of one embodiment of the single quarter-wave resonator network **300** of FIG. 3A. The phase difference is measured by the third element **308** in FIG. 3A. The x-axis **402** in FIG. 4A comprises a frequency range of the injected signal, and the y-axis **400** comprises the phase difference between the injected and the reflected signals. The phase difference is plotted from -180 to +180 degrees with a line **410**. If the phase difference changes from -179 to +179 degrees, for example, a vertical line, such as a line **412** in FIG. 4A, will

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appear. Other than the line **412**, the rate of change of the phase difference is substantially constant, and there are no areas of increased rate of phase difference change in FIG. 4A.

FIG. 4B illustrates a phase difference between injected and reflected signals (a reflected-signal phase response) of one embodiment of the two-finger interdigital filter network **310** of FIG. 3B. The phase difference is measured by the fourth element **318** in FIG. 3B. The phase difference is plotted from -180 to +180 degrees with a line **414**. In FIG. 4B, there is a frequency range associated with a high rate of phase difference change. The frequency range is between about 2.4 GHz (point **420**) and about 3GHz (point **426**). The steepest slope occurs at ± 180 degrees (points **422**, **424**), which is expected (but unfortunate that the software simulator chooses this point to swap between negative and positive degrees).

FIG. 4C illustrates a phase difference between injected and reflected signals (a reflected-signal phase response) of one embodiment of the three-finger interdigital filter network **320** of FIG. 3C. The phase difference is measured by the seventh element **334** in FIG. 3C. The phase difference is plotted from -180 to +180 degrees with a line **429**. In FIG. 4C, there are two frequency ranges associated with a high rate of phase difference change. The first frequency range is between about 2.0 GHz (point **430**) and about 2.7 GHz (point **436**). The second frequency range is between about 2.7 GHz (point **436**) and about 3.3 GHz (point **442**). In FIG. 4C, the highest rate of phase difference change (steepest slopes) occur at ± 180 degrees at points **432**, **434**, **438** and **440**.

The resonator **102** in FIG. 1 may be observed as a one-port network with a 3-finger interdigital filter, such as the network **320** in FIG. 3C. When the resonator **102** is observed as the network **320**, there are two frequency ranges (from point **430** to point **436** and from point **436** to point **442**) associated with a high rate of phase difference change, as described above with reference to FIG. 4C. The two frequency ranges associated with a high rate of phase difference change are caused by two poles of the filter **320** in FIG. 3C (and the resonator **102** in FIG. 1). The two frequency ranges are near a required (desired) oscillation frequency of the resonator **102**.

In one embodiment, the lower frequency range (between about 2.0 GHz (point **430**) and about 2.7 GHz (point **436**)) associated with a high rate of phase difference change is configured to provide the highest rate of phase difference change possible and the lowest insertion loss possible. Insertion loss represents an amount of power lost as a signal passes through a device, such as the resonator **102**. A network that exhibits a high rate of phase difference change and low insertion loss will inherently have a high unloaded Q. As shown below, maximizing the unloaded Q of a resonator in Leeson's phase noise equation will minimize phase noise.

$$L(f) = \frac{1}{2} \left[\frac{\omega \omega^2}{4\omega_m^2} \left(\frac{Pin}{\omega We} + \frac{1}{Qunl} + \frac{Psig}{\omega \omega We} \right)^2 \right] \left(1 + \frac{\omega c}{\omega m} \right) \frac{FkTo}{Pavs}$$

- L(f)=phase noise at a frequency offset f
- $\omega \omega$ =oscillator frequency
- ωm =offset frequency
- Pin=input power
- We=reactive energy
- Qunl=unloaded Q

P_{sig} =signal power
 ω_c =flicker noise corner frequency
 F =frequency
 κ =Boltzman's Constant
 T_o =temperature
 P_{avs} =noise-free power source

Negative Resistance Generator

A negative resistance may be considered a source of electrical energy. A negative resistance implies that a device is active. The negative resistance generator **104** in FIG. **1** amplifies the reflected signal from the resonator **102** and injects the signal back into the resonator **102**. The phase response of the negative resistance generator **104** is configured to cancel the phase response of the interdigital filter in the resonator **102** where a maximum rate of phase difference change occurs, such as points **432**, **434** (FIG. **4C**) and/or between points **432**, **434**.

Structurally, the negative resistance generator **104** in FIG. **1** comprises a second capacitor **124**, a third capacitor **126**, a first resistor **128**, a second resistor **130**, a third resistor **140**, a fourth capacitor **178**, an active device or active element **150**, a fourth resistor **132**, a fifth resistor **152**, a fifth capacitor **134**, a sixth capacitor **138**, a voltage supply **136**, a seventh capacitor **144**, an eighth capacitor **146**, a ninth capacitor **148**, and an output port **154**. In one embodiment, the output port **154** is further coupled to a sixth resistor **170**, a seventh resistor **172** and an eighth resistor **174**.

In one embodiment, the second, fourth and ninth capacitors **124**, **178**, **148** in FIG. **1** each comprise a 0.8-pF ATC600S capacitor. The third capacitor **126** comprises a 1-nF capacitor. The fifth capacitor **134** comprises a 10-pF capacitor. The sixth capacitor **138** comprises a 100-nF capacitor. The seventh capacitor **144** comprises a 10-pF ATC600S capacitor. The eighth capacitor **146** comprises a 0.3-pF ATC600S capacitor. The ninth capacitor **148** comprises a 0.8-pF ATC600S capacitor.

In one embodiment, the first resistor **128** comprises a 2.0-kohm or a 2.7-kohm resistor. The second resistor **130** comprises a 5-kohm or 5.6-kohm resistor. The third resistor **140** comprises a 1-kohm resistor. The fourth and fifth resistors **132**, **152** each comprise a 180-ohm resistor. The sixth and eighth resistors **170**, **174** each comprise a 150R-ohm resistor, and the seventh resistor **172** comprises a 39-ohm resistor.

In one embodiment, the active element **150** in FIG. **1** comprises a npn bipolar junction transistor (BJT). In one configuration, the active element **150** comprises an NE68135 transistor (TR2) used in a standard common-collector configuration. In other embodiments, other types of active elements, such as a diode, metal oxide semiconductor field-effect transistor (MOSFET), a GaAs FET, a JFET or other types of FETs, may be implemented with various bias conditions instead of or in addition to a BJT. In one embodiment, the voltage supply **136** provides 10 volts. In other embodiments, the voltage supply provides more than or less than 10 volts.

In one embodiment, the first, second, fourth and fifth resistors **128**, **130**, **132**, **152** set a DC bias voltage across collector and emitter terminals Vce equal to 5V and a collector current Ic equal to 14 mA. The seventh capacitor **144** produces a RF ground at one terminal of the active element **150**, e.g., the collector terminal of a transistor. The fourth and ninth capacitors **178**, **148** are selected to provide a desired negative resistance, as described below. The eighth

capacitor **146** lightly couples some of the oscillator signal to the output port **154**. The third, fifth and sixth capacitors **130**, **134**, **138** decouple the voltage supply line **136**.

In operation, when a signal at a specific frequency is applied to an input port **180** of the negative resistance generator **104** in FIG. **1**, a signal with the same frequency but with a higher magnitude will be output at the same port **180**. In other words, a reflection-transmission coefficient S_{11} of the negative resistance generator **104** will be greater than zero, $S_{11} > 0$. The reflection coefficient is the amount of reflected voltage or current divided by the incident (injected) voltage or current. Those of ordinary skill in the art may use a Smith chart to plot normalized impedance with the angle and magnitude of a generalized complex reflection coefficient in a unity circle. If the reflection-transmission coefficient S_{11} of the negative resistance generator **104** is viewed on a standard Smith chart over a large frequency range, all frequencies that have negative resistance will be outside the standard Smith chart and are typically plotted on a 'compressed' or 'extended' Smith chart.

By using a transformation $S_{11}' = 1/S_{11}$, however, S_{11}' can be plotted on a standard Smith chart (see FIG. **5A**), and all frequencies that have negative resistance will appear inside the Smith chart. But the direction of rotation on the Smith chart for increasing frequencies with negative resistance will be reversed, i.e., the direction of rotation will be opposite to the direction of rotation for increasing frequencies with positive resistance.

FIG. **5A** illustrates an example of a Smith chart with a S_{11} response plot **504** of the resonator **102** in FIG. **1** and a S_{11}' response plot **502** of the negative resistance generator **104**. In FIG. **5A**, any area where the response **502** of the negative resistance generator **104** is inside the response **504** of the resonator **102**, and the two responses **502**, **504** have the same phase, the conditions for oscillation are satisfied. Conditions for oscillation can be described with reference to FIG. **6**.

FIG. **6** illustrates a simplified diagram **600** of the resonator **102** and the negative resistance generator **104** of FIG. **1**. The negative resistance generator **104** in FIG. **1** may be converted into an equivalent negative resistance generator circuit **610**, which comprises a negative resistance $-R_G$ and a reactance jX_G . The resonator **102** in FIG. **1** may be converted into an equivalent resonator circuit **620**, which comprises a resistance R_L and a reactance jX_L . If the resonator **620** and the negative resistance generator **610** are coupled together, oscillations can be sustained at each frequency where the following two conditions are satisfied: $R_L - R_G = 0$ and $X_G + X_L = 0$. In addition, one condition for reliable oscillation start-up may be $|R_G| > 1.2 R_L$ (impedance mismatch).

In FIG. **5A**, a first marker **m1** is on the S_{11}' response plot **502** of the negative resistance generator **104**, and a second marker **m2** is on the S_{11} response plot **504** of the resonator **102**. For one embodiment of the VCO **100**, the phase and frequency of both responses S_{11} and S_{11}' are substantially identical at markers **m1** and **m2** in FIG. **5A**. In one embodiment, the frequency at **m1** is equal to 2.201 GHz, the S_{11}' response is equal to 0.398/174.149, and the impedance is equal to $Z_0^*(0.431 + j0.042)$, where Z_0 is a characteristic impedance. If the S_{11}' response at **m1** is converted to a S_{11} response using the equation $S_{11} = 1/S_{11}'$, then the impedance is equal to $Z_0^*(-0.433 - j0.043)$. In one embodiment, the frequency at **m2** is equal to 2.200 GHz, the S_{11} response is equal to 0.978/174.684, and the impedance is equal to $Z_0^*(0.018 + j0.046)$.

With the first and second markers **m1** and **m2**, $X_G + X_L = -0.043 + 0.046$ which is almost equal to zero. The 0.003 error

occurs because the markers **m1**, **m2** are on slightly different frequency points which is due to the way the software performs the simulation. In addition, the absolute value R_G (0.433) of is much greater than R_L (0.018) for the VCO **100** in FIG. 1. Thus, the conditions for oscillation start-up for the VCO **100** are satisfied at **m1** and **m2**.

To provide optimum low phase noise performance, i.e., to minimize phase noise, the phase where the resonator S_{11} response **502** and the negative resistance generator S_{11} response **504** are the same (at markers **m1** and **m2**) should occur at the point of maximum rate of phase difference change, such as the points **432** and **434** in FIG. 4C.

Most VCOs are configured to oscillate at only one frequency at a time. Thus, in one embodiment of a VCO, the conditions for oscillation should be met only once. The 3-finger interdigital resonator **102** in FIG. 1 has a S_{11} response with two narrow frequency ranges (between points **434** and **432** in FIG. 4C and between points **438** and **440**) of high rate of phase difference change. To provide only one frequency of oscillation, the negative resistance generator **104** in FIG. 1 is configured to generate (1) a sufficient negative resistance for at least the first frequency range (between points **434** and **432**) of high rate of phase difference change and (2) a positive resistance for at least the second frequency range (between points **438** and **440**). Thus, the conditions for oscillation in the second frequency range (between points **438** and **440**) are not satisfied.

In one embodiment, the negative resistance generator **104** is configured to generate a negative resistance only up to a maximum frequency that is below the frequency at point **438** in FIG. 4C associated with the second pole of the interdigital filter response of the resonator **102**. Simultaneously, the phase response of the negative resistance generator **104** is configured to cancel the phase response of the interdigital filter in the resonator **102** between points **434** and **432** where maximum rate of phase difference change occurs.

A third marker **m3** in FIG. 5A denotes the highest frequency where negative resistance is generated in one embodiment. In one embodiment, the frequency at **m3** is equal to 2.665 GHz, the S_{11} response at **m3** is equal to 0.978/-146.292, and the impedance at **m3** is equal to Z_0^* (0.012+j0.303). As shown in FIG. 4C, 2.665 GHz is below the frequency of the point **438**, where the second narrow frequency range of high rate of phase difference change begins.

FIG. 5B illustrates a phase of one embodiment of the resonator **102** in FIG. 1 plotted with respect to oscillation frequency in GHz. As shown in FIG. 5B, the phase of the resonator **102** is about 180 degrees at a frequency of 2.20 GHz.

The above-described embodiments of the present invention are merely meant to be illustrative and not limiting. Various changes and modifications may be made without departing from the invention in its broader aspects. For example, the resonator **102** and/or the negative resistance generator **104** in FIG. 1 may be designed in various ways with other types and/or values of capacitors, resistors, inductors, varactors, substrates and resonator dimensions in accordance with the present invention. The appended claims encompass such changes and modifications within the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A voltage-controlled oscillator comprising:

a resonator comprising a three-finger interdigital filter and a plurality of varactors, a first varactor coupled to a first finger of the interdigital filter and a ground terminal, a

second varactor coupled to a third finger of the interdigital filter and a ground terminal, a second finger of the interdigital filter coupled to a ground terminal, wherein the first and second varactors are configured to alter a resonant frequency of the interdigital filter to a desired frequency in response to a tuning voltage applied to the resonator; and

a negative resistance generator coupled to the resonator, the negative resistance generator configured to receive a first signal from the resonator, the first signal having a frequency, the negative resistance generator configured to output a second signal, the second signal having a substantially similar frequency and a higher amplitude compared to the first signal.

2. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the first and second varactors comprise silicon varactor diodes.

3. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the resonator further comprises a third varactor and a fourth varactor, the third varactor coupled to the first interdigital filter finger and a ground terminal, the fourth varactor coupled to the third interdigital filter finger and a ground terminal.

4. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the first interdigital filter finger comprises a 1.2 mm×21 mm microstrip 50 ohm track, the second interdigital filter finger comprises a 2.5 mm×21 mm microstrip 30 ohm track, and the third interdigital filter finger comprises a 1.2 mm×21 mm microstrip 50 ohm track.

5. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the first and second interdigital filter fingers are separated by a spacing of 0.18 mm, and the second and third interdigital filter finger are separated by a spacing of 0.18 mm.

6. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the first, second and third interdigital filter fingers are implemented on a 0.5 mm teflon substrate.

7. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the resonator and the negative resistance generator comprise a microstrip circuit etched on a 0.5 mm-thick, double-sided, teflon laminate.

8. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the resonator further comprises a first radiofrequency choke coupled to the first interdigital filter finger and a second radiofrequency choke coupled to the third interdigital filter finger.

9. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 8, wherein the resonator further comprises a capacitor coupled to the first and second radiofrequency chokes and a ground terminal.

10. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the tuning voltage is between about 0 volts to about 6 volts.

11. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the negative resistance generator comprises a transistor configured in a common-collector configuration, at least one resistor and at least one capacitor.

12. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the negative resistance generator comprises a diode, at least one resistor and at least one capacitor.

13. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the negative resistance generator comprises a metal oxide semiconductor field-effect transistor, at least one resistor and at least one capacitor.

14. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the negative resistance generator is configured to generate a negative resistance for a first frequency range associated with a high rate of phase difference change of the resonator and a positive resistance for a second frequency range associated with a high rate of phase difference change of the resonator.

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15. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the negative resistance generator is configured to generate a negative resistance only up to a maximum frequency that is below a frequency associated with a pole of an interdigital filter response of the resonator.

16. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein a phase response of the negative resistance generator is configured to cancel the phase response of the interdigital filter in the resonator for a frequency range of the resonator associated with a high rate of phase difference change.

17. The voltage-controlled oscillator of claim 1, wherein the resonator and the negative resistance generator are configured to provide an oscillating signal at a desired oscillation frequency.

18. A method of generating an oscillating signal at a desired frequency, the method comprising:

applying a tuning voltage to a resonator, the resonator comprising an interdigital filter and a plurality of varactors, the interdigital filter comprising a first finger, a second finger and a third finger, the first finger coupled to a first varactor and the third finger coupled to a second varactor; and

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using the tuning voltage to alter a resonant frequency of the interdigital filter to generate a signal with a desired oscillation frequency.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising amplifying the signal with a desired oscillation frequency.

20. The method of claim 18, further comprising generating a negative resistance for a first frequency range associated with a high rate of phase difference change of the resonator and a positive resistance for a second frequency range associated with a high rate of phase difference change of the resonator.

21. The method of claim 18, further comprising generating a negative resistance only up to a maximum frequency that is below a frequency associated with a pole of an interdigital filter response of the resonator.

22. The method of claim 18, further comprising canceling the phase response of the resonator for a frequency range of the resonator associated with a high rate of phase difference change.

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