



FPGA-Based System Design

By Wayne Wolf

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Everything FPGA designers need to know about FPGAs and VLSI

Digital designs once built in custom silicon are increasingly implemented in field programmable gate arrays (FPGAs). Effective FPGA system design requires a strong understanding of VLSI issues and constraints, and an understanding of the latest FPGA-specific techniques. In this book, Princeton University's Wayne Wolf covers everything FPGA designers need to know about all these topics: both the "how" and the "why."

Wolf begins by introducing the essentials of VLSI: fabrication, circuits, interconnects, combinational and sequential logic design, system architectures, and more. Next, he demonstrates how to reflect this VLSI knowledge in a state-of-the-art design methodology that leverages FPGA's most valuable characteristics while mitigating its limitations. Coverage includes:

- How VLSI characteristics affect FPGAs and FPGA-based logic design
- How classical logic design techniques relate to FPGA-based logic design
- Understanding FPGA fabrics: the basic programmable structures of FPGAs
- Specifying and optimizing logic to address size, speed, and power consumption
- Verilog, VHDL, and software tools for optimizing logic and designs
- The structure of large digital systems, including register-transfer design methodology
- Building large-scale platform and multi-FPGA systems
- A start-to-finish DSP case study addressing a wide range of design problems

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

WAYNE WOLF is Professor of Electrical Engineering and Associated Faculty in the Department of Computer Science at Princeton University. His research interests include embedded computing, multimedia systems, VLSI and computer-aided design. He is the author of *Computers as Components: Principles of Embedded Computer System Design* and *Modern VLSI Design, Third Edition*. He is a Fellow of the IEEE and ACM, and an IEEE Computer Society Golden Core member. In 2003, he earned the ASEE/EED and HP Frederick E. Terman Award.

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This book is an experiment. Shortly after completing the third edition of *Modern VLSI Design*, I came to realize that an increasing number of digital designs that used to be built in custom silicon are now implemented in field programmable gate arrays (FPGAs). While traditional VLSI system design won't go away any time soon, an increasing number of designers will work with FPGAs and many of them will never design a custom chip.

However, designers of large FPGA-based systems really do need to understand the fundamentals of VLSI in order to make best use of their FPGAs. While it is true that many system designers simply treat the FPGA as

a black box, that approach makes the system designer miss many opportunities to optimize the design to fit within the FPGA. The architecture of FPGAs is largely determined by VLSI constraints: logic element structures, programmable interconnect structures, interconnection networks, configuration, pinout, etc. Understanding how the characteristics of VLSI devices influence the design of FPGA fabrics helps the designer better understand how to take advantage of the FPGA's best characteristics and to minimize the influence of its limitations.

Consider, for example, the interconnection networks in FPGAs. Most modern FPGA architectures provide designers with several different types of wires: local, general purpose, and global. Why do all these different types of connections exist? Because wires become harder to drive as they grow in length; the extra circuitry required to drive long wires makes them more expensive. Understanding how these different types of interconnect work helps a designer decide whether a particular logic connection requires one of the more expensive types of wires.

Today's FPGAs are truly amazing. High-end FPGAs can hold several million gates. Several FPGAs incorporate one or more CPUs on-chip to provide a complete embedded computing platform. Many of the techniques for designing such large systems are the same whether they are built using FPGAs or custom silicon. This is particularly true when we want to make best use of the silicon characteristics of VLSI structures.

As a result of these advances in VLSI systems, I decided to use Modern VLSI Design as a starting point for a new book on FPGA-based system design. Readers of Modern VLSI Design will recognize material from most of the chapters in that book. I have extracted material on VLSI characteristics, circuits, combinational and sequential logic design, and system architectures. However, I have also added quite a bit of new material, some of which is specific to FPGAs and some of which is simply a new (and I hope better) look at digital system design.

One of my major goals in writing this book was to provide a useful text for both designers interested in VLSI and those who simply want to use FPGAs to build big systems. Chapter 2 of this book is devoted to a review of VLSI: fabrication, circuits, interconnect characteristics, etc. Throughout the rest of the book, I have tried to break out most details of VLSI design into separate sections that can be skipped by the reader who is not interested in VLSI. However, those who want to understand more about the design of FPGAs as VLSI devices can read this material at their leisure. Chapter 3 is devoted to a survey of FPGA fabrics--the basic programmable structures of FPGAs. The commercial offerings of companies change all the time, so this chapter is not meant to be a replacement for a data book. Its goal is to introduce some basic concepts in FPGAs and to compare different approaches to solving the basic problems in programmable logic. What to do with these FPGA structures is the subject of the rest of the book.

Chapters 4 and 5 go into detail about combinational and sequential logic design, respectively. They describe methods for the specification and optimization of digital logic to meet the major goals in most design efforts: size, speed, and power consumption. We introduce both Verilog and VHDL in this book. While this book is not intended as a definitive reference on either language, hardware description languages are the medium of choice today for designing digital systems. A basic understanding of these languages, as well as of the fundamentals of hardware description languages, is essential to success in digital system design. We also study the tools for optimizing logic and sequential machine designs in order to understand how to best make use of logic and physical synthesis.

Chapter 6 looks at the structure of large digital systems. This chapter introduces register-transfer design as a methodology for structuring digital designs. It uses a simple DSP as a design example. This DSP is not intended as a state-of-the-art CPU design, but it does allow us to consider a large number of different design

problems in a single example.

Chapter 7 caps off the book by studying large-scale systems built with FPGAs. Platform FPGAs that include CPUs and FPGA fabrics allow designers to mix hardware and software on a single chip to solve difficult design problems. Multi-FPGA systems can be used to implement very large designs; a single multi-FPGA system can be programmed to implement many different logic designs. So what will happen to ASIC design? I don't think it will go away--people will still need the high density and high performance that only custom silicon provides. But I think that FPGAs will become one of the major modes of implementation for digital systems.

Xilinx has graciously allowed us to include CDs that contain the Xilinx Student Edition (XSE) tools. The examples in this book were prepared with these tools and you can follow along with the examples using the tools. You can also use them to create your own examples. Having a working set of tools makes it much easier to practice concepts and I greatly appreciate Xilinx's help with including these books. If you can find additional materials for the book at the Web site:

<http://www.ee.princeton.edu/~wolf/fpga-book>

The Web site includes overheads for the chapters, pointer to additional Web materials, some sample labs, and errata. Properly accredited instructors can obtain a copy of the instructor's manual by contacting the publisher. I hope you enjoy this book; please feel free to email me at wolf@princeton.edu.

I'd like to thank the students of ELE 462 in the spring of 2003, who were patient with my experimentation on the traditional VLSI course. I'd also like to thank Jiang Xu and Li Shang, my teaching assistants that semester, who improved our infrastructure for FPGA design and helped me debug the DSP design. Mike Butts and Mohammed Khalid gave valuable advice on partitioning algorithms. Steven Brown, Jonathan Rose, Zvonko Vranesic, and William Yu provided figures from their papers to be put directly into the book, providing data straight from the source for the reader as well as simplifying my life as a typesetter. I greatly appreciate the thorough review of a draft of this manuscript given by Andre De Hon, Carl Ebeling, Yankin Tanurhan, and Steve Trimberger; they all made many excellent suggestions on how to improve this book. I greatly appreciate the efforts of Ivo Bolsens, Anna Acevedo, and Jeff Weintraub for access to the knowledge of Xilinx in general and permission to include the Xilinx ISE disks with this book in particular. And, of course, I'd like to thank my editor Bernard Goodwin for his tireless efforts on behalf of this book. All the problems remaining in the book, both small and large, are of course my responsibility.

Wayne Wolf

Princeton, New Jersey

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