

# High-Performance Formamidinium-Based Perovskite Solar Cells via Microstructure-Mediated $\delta$ -to- $\alpha$ Phase Transformation

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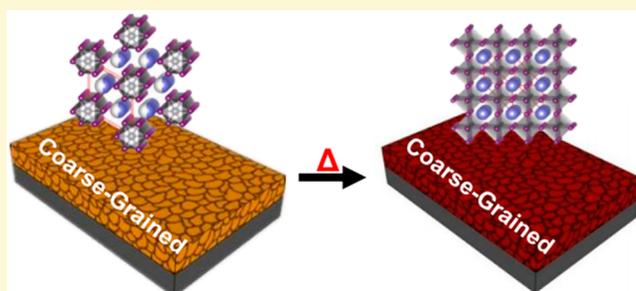
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## Supporting Information

**ABSTRACT:** The  $\delta \rightarrow \alpha$  phase transformation is a crucial step in the solution-growth process of formamidinium-based lead triiodide (FAPbI<sub>3</sub>) hybrid organic–inorganic perovskite (HOIP) thin films for perovskite solar cells (PSCs). Because the addition of cesium (Cs) stabilizes the  $\alpha$  phase of FAPbI<sub>3</sub>-based HOIPs, here our research focuses on FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films. We show that having a large grain size in the  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) non-perovskite intermediate films is essential for the growth of high-quality  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films. Here grain coarsening and phase transformation occur simultaneously during the thermal annealing step. A large starting grain size in the  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films suppresses grain coarsening, precluding the formation of voids at the final  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs)–substrate interfaces. PSCs based on the interface void-free  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films are much more efficient and stable in the ambient atmosphere. This interesting finding inspired us to develop a simple room-temperature aging method for preparing coarse-grained  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) intermediate films, which are subsequently converted to coarse-grained, high-quality  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films. This study highlights the importance of microstructure meditation in the processing of formamidinium-based PSCs.



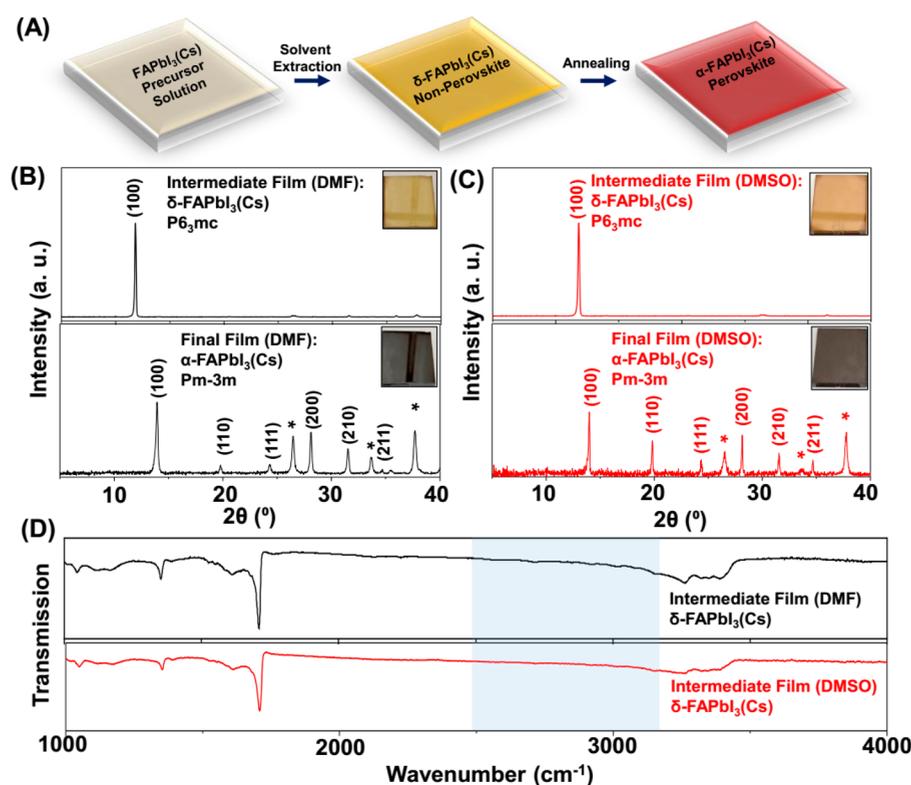
Since the invention of perovskite solar cells (PSCs) in 2009,<sup>1</sup> tremendous research efforts have been devoted to improving the power conversion efficiency (PCE) and stability of PSCs.<sup>2,3</sup> While methylammonium lead triiodide (CH<sub>3</sub>NH<sub>3</sub>PbI<sub>3</sub> or MAPbI<sub>3</sub>) hybrid organic–inorganic perovskite (HOIP) is the most widely studied for PSC application, it has an intrinsic limitation in harvesting near-infrared (NIR) light in the solar spectrum because of its relatively wide bandgap of  $\sim 1.55$  eV.<sup>3–5</sup> In addition, the thermal stability of MAPbI<sub>3</sub> is a matter of concern considering its low formation entropy.<sup>6</sup> Recently, there has been growing interest in exploring the potential of formamidinium lead triiodide ( $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>) HOIP for PSC application.<sup>7,8</sup>  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub> HOIP has a lower bandgap ( $\sim 1.45$  eV),<sup>9,10</sup> which is closer to the ideal bandgap (1.2–1.3 eV)<sup>11</sup> for single-junction solar cells. Moreover, significantly enhanced thermal stability has been confirmed in  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub> as compared to MAPbI<sub>3</sub>.<sup>12</sup> In spite of these exceptional advantages, there is significant concern about the  $\alpha$  phase stability of  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>, which has held back the

development of  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>-based PSCs.<sup>13–16</sup> Pure FAPbI<sub>3</sub> has two polymorphs at room temperature (RT): the “black” HOIP phase  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub> (space group  $P3m1$ <sup>9,10</sup> or  $Pm\bar{3}m$ <sup>17</sup>) and the “yellow” non-perovskite phase  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub> (space group  $P6_3mc$ <sup>9,10</sup>). In some previous studies by some of us<sup>13,16,18</sup> and others,<sup>14,15</sup> it has been shown that the phase transformation (either  $\alpha \rightarrow \delta$  or  $\delta \rightarrow \alpha$ ) behavior is closely associated with the degradation and crystallization process of  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub> HOIP. The manipulation of such phase transformation is key to the quality of the final  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub> HOIP thin films and the performance (PCE and stability) of the resulting PSCs. To date, there have been several studies aimed at understanding and exploiting these effects.<sup>13–16</sup> For example, doping of FAPbI<sub>3</sub> with a small amount of inorganic cesium (Cs) appears to be a promising approach for stabilizing the  $\alpha$  phase of FAPbI<sub>3</sub>-based

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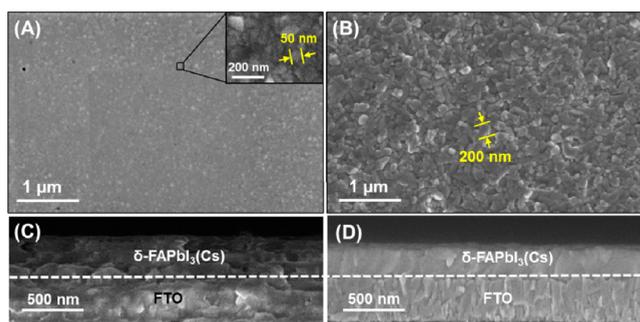
**Figure 1.** (A) Schematic illustration of the formation process of the  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin film. X-ray diffraction patterns of the intermediate and final thin films based on different solvents: (B) dimethylformamide (DMF) and (C) dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO). Peaks from the substrate are denoted with asterisks. (D) FTIR spectra of the intermediate thin films with either DMF or DMSO as the solvent used in the precursor solutions.

HOIPs.<sup>14–16</sup> [Because of the uncertainty in the actual amount of the Cs incorporated into the HOIP crystal structure, the FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) nomenclature is adopted throughout this paper.] The superior material properties of  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIPs and the performance of the resulting PSCs have been unambiguously demonstrated by several groups.<sup>14–16</sup> However, the solution crystallization behavior of  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) has been rarely discussed, and the rational selection of specific solvents for the solution synthesis of high-quality  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films has not been elucidated.

In this study, we show that the solution crystallization process of  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films is quite different from that of the widely studied MAPbI<sub>3</sub> HOIP films.<sup>19</sup> The antisolvent–solvent extraction (ASE)-based “one-step” method is used here, as this method represents a “model” technique for the growth of uniform HOIP thin films from solution over a wide compositional space.<sup>20–23</sup> Figure 1A schematically shows the crystallization process of  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films. It appears that the first phase that evolves at room temperature (RT) in the ASE process is the “yellow” non-perovskite  $\delta$  phase. Here, two commonly used solvents, dimethylformamide (DMF) and dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) are used in the precursor solutions. The selection of solvent does not affect the phase evolution in the ASE process. As seen in panels B and C of Figure 1, in both cases, phase-pure, highly textured (100) “yellow”  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films are formed at the end of the ASE process. The 100 texture development in the thin film could be the result of the intrinsic one-dimensional (1D) crystallographic symmetry of the  $\delta$  phase.<sup>9</sup> For comparison, it is well-known that, in the ASE deposition of MAPbI<sub>3</sub>, some coordinative solution solvents such as DMSO have very strong interactions with MAPbI<sub>3</sub>, which results in the formation of a

large lattice parameter MAPbI<sub>3</sub>• $x$ DMSO complex as the first crystalline phase after the ASE process.<sup>19,20</sup> However, both panels B and C of Figure 1 show featureless X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns in the small-angle region ( $2\theta < 10^\circ$ ), which indicates that the possible FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs)• $x$ DMF or FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs)• $x$ DMSO complexes do not form at the end of the ASE process. The Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) results in Figure 1D further confirm the absence of C=O and S=O bonds in the “yellow”  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) intermediate thin films; such bonds are typically present in the complexes.<sup>24</sup> While the detailed chemistry remains to be further elucidated, this interesting difference between FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) and MAPbI<sub>3</sub> can be attributed to the unique polymorphism in the former. It is possible that the formation energy of the  $\delta$  phase is much lower than that of the solvent-coordinated HOIP complexes at low temperatures, which favors the crystallization of  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) as the intermediate phase. Because  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) is energetically not stable at higher temperatures, it turns dark in the subsequent thermal annealing (150 °C) step. Finally, phase-pure  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP films form in both DMF and DMSO cases, as confirmed by the optical photographs and the XRD patterns in panels B and C of Figure 1.

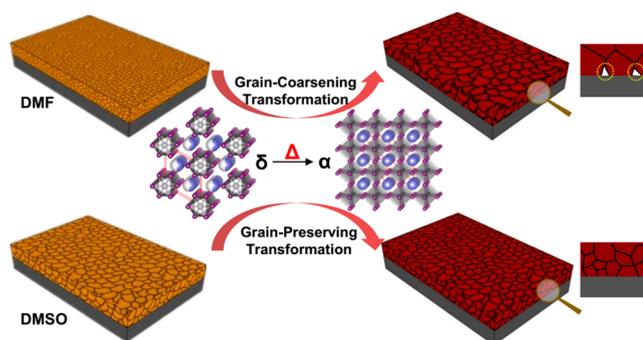
While phases of the intermediate thin films after the ASE have been confirmed above, morphologies of these  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films are then studied using scanning electron microscopy (SEM). Panels A and B of Figure 2 compare the surface morphology of the intermediate  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films prepared using DMF and DMSO, respectively, as solvents in precursor solutions. Average grain sizes of both intermediate  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films are measured with the image analysis approach, and the results are shown in Figure S1. The average grain sizes in the DMF and DMSO cases are ~50 and ~200



**Figure 2.** (A and B) Top-view and (C and D) cross-sectional SEM images of the “yellow”  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) non-perovskite intermediate thin film processed using (A and C) DMF and (B and D) DMSO as the solvents in precursor solutions.

using DMF and DMSO as solvents in precursor solutions, 159 respectively. Interestingly, in the DMF solvent case, although 160 the top surface of the resultant  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin film is dense, 161 voids are frequently observed at the  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs)–substrate 162 interface. Because these interfacial defects do not exist in the 163 intermediate  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin film (Figure 2C), they appear 164 to emerge during the thermal annealing step. In contrast, in the 165 DMSO solvent case (Figure 2D), the defect-free  $\delta$ - 166 FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs)–substrate interface is inherited by the final  $\alpha$ - 167 FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) film (Figure 3D), where no defect forms during 168 the thermal annealing step. 169

On the basis of these phase and microstructure character- 170 ization results, a hypothesized mechanism responsible for such 171 differences is schematically shown in Figure 4. Typically, the 172

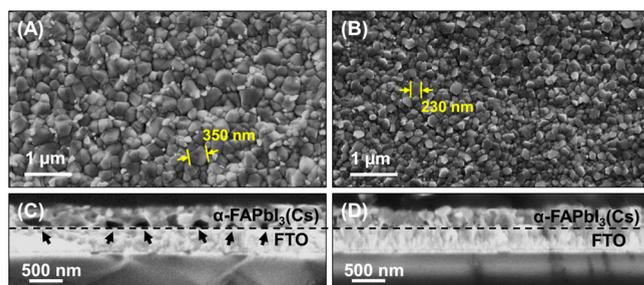


**Figure 4.** Hypothesized mechanisms for microstructural evolution associated with the  $\delta$ -to- $\alpha$  phase transformation during thermal annealing. Note that “grain-preserving” here means there is no obvious coarsening of grains during the phase transformation.

thermal annealing treatment simultaneously induces two 173 effects:  $\delta \rightarrow \alpha$  phase transformation and grain coarsening. 174 The grain-coarsening behavior is described by the equation  $d^2 - d_0^2 = Kt$ , where  $d_0$  is the initial grain size,  $d$  is the final grain 175 size,  $t$  is the time, and  $K$  is a constant with exponential 176 temperature dependence.<sup>19,26</sup> In the DMF solvent case, the 177 grain size in the final  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin film is  $\sim 7$  times 178 of that in the starting  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin film. By contrast, in 179 the DMSO case, the grain size does not change much. 180 Moreover, the phase transformations in the two cases reach 181 completion at almost the same time (Figure S2). Therefore, the 182 grain coarsening rate in the DMF solvent case is much higher 183 than that in the DMSO solvent case. Such a rapid change in the 184 microstructure together with the phase transformation may 185 increase the possibility of the generation of voids. Note that, 186 compared with the top surface and interior of the thin film, the 187 film–substrate interface is less accommodating of significant 188 changes in the thin film microstructure because of the substrate 189 constraint, which may explain the appearance of voids at the  $\alpha$ - 190 FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs)–substrate interface. In the case of the DMSO 191 solvent, the grain coarsening during the phase transformation is 192 negligible, resulting in a relatively stable microstructure, 193 mitigating the formation of defects at the  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs)– 194 substrate interface. 195

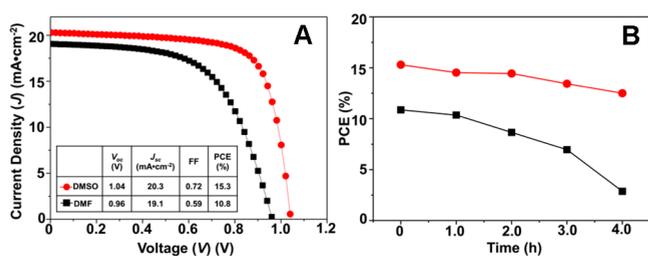
To evaluate the photovoltaic (PV) performance of the  $\alpha$ - 197 FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films, a planar PSC architecture with 198 the HOIP thin film sandwiched between an electron-extracting 199 TiO<sub>2</sub>/FTO (fluorinated tin oxide) anode and a hole-extracting 200 spiro-OMeTAD/Ag cathode is employed. Figure 5A shows the 201 typical current density ( $J$ )–voltage ( $V$ ) curves (reverse scans) 202 of PSCs based on  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP films processed using 203

129 nm, respectively. This grain size difference may be related to 130 solvent extraction kinetics in different solvent systems.<sup>25</sup> DMF, 131 which generally has weaker interaction with the halide 132 precursor phases, is assumed to be extracted more rapidly. 133 Thus, a higher degree of supersaturation and a higher 134 nucleation density are expected, which is responsible for the 135 ultrafine grain structure in the as-crystallized  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin 136 films. In spite of the grain size difference, the corresponding 137 cross-sectional SEM images of the  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) intermediate 138 thin films in panels C and D of Figure 2 show uniform 139 thickness, excellent compactness, and defect-free film–substrate 140 interfaces in both cases. The smooth, mirrorlike surfaces of 141 “yellow”  $\delta$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films appear to be retained 142 throughout the process of conversion to the final “black”  $\alpha$ - 143 FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP in both DMF and DMSO cases, as shown in 144 Figure S2. Full coverage and uniform grain structure in  $\alpha$ - 145 FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films in both cases are confirmed by the top- 146 view SEM images in panels A and B of Figure 3. Average grain

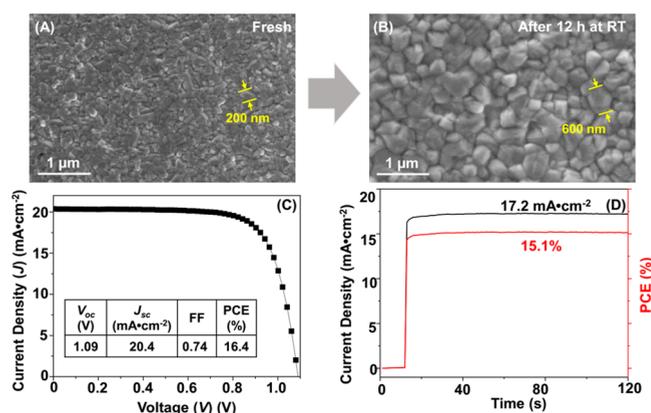


**Figure 3.** (A and B) Top-view and (C and D) cross-sectional SEM images of the “black”  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films processed using (A and C) DMF and (B and D) DMSO as the solvents in precursor solutions.

147 sizes of both  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films are measured with the 148 image analysis approach, and the results are presented in Figure 149 S3. Average grain sizes of the  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) thin films in DMF 150 and DMSO cases are  $\sim 350$  and  $\sim 230$  nm, respectively. In this 151 context, a significant grain-coarsening effect is observed in the 152 DMF case (from  $\sim 50$  to  $\sim 350$  nm) but not in the DMSO case 153 (from  $\sim 200$  to  $\sim 230$  nm). After the phase transformation, the 154 shape of the grains becomes more equiaxed in the  $\alpha$ - 155 FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films, which can be attributed to the 156 three-dimensional “cubic” crystal symmetry<sup>9</sup> of the  $\alpha$ - 157 FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs). Panels C and D of Figure 3 show cross-sectional 158 SEM images of the  $\alpha$ -FAPbI<sub>3</sub>(Cs) HOIP thin films processed



**Figure 5.** Planar PSCs based on  $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  thin films processed using DMF (black) and DMSO (red) as solvents in the precursor solutions: (A)  $J$ - $V$  responses (inset, PV performance parameters) and (B) ambient stability of PCE.



**Figure 6.** Top-view SEM images of a  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  thin film processed using DMSO as the solvent: (A) before and (B) after additional 12 h room-temperature aging. (C) Current density–voltage ( $J$ - $V$ ) response (inset, PV performance parameters) of the PSC based on the  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  HOIP thin film converted from the coarse-grained  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  thin film. (D) Stabilized  $J$  and PCE output at the maximal power point ( $V = 0.88$  V).

204 DMF and DMSO as solvents in precursor solutions. The  
 205 respective PV performance parameters extracted from  $J$ - $V$   
 206 curves are shown in the inset table of Figure 5A. It is clear that  
 207 the PSC processed with DMSO solvent shows much better PV  
 208 performance with respect of all PV parameters. The typical  
 209 PCE (15.3%) in the DMSO case is 50% higher than that in the  
 210 DMF case (10.8%). Figure S4 shows that  $J$ - $V$  hysteresis exists  
 211 in both cases. While the hysteresis is typical in the  $\text{TiO}_2$ -based  
 212 planar PSCs, the PSC processed with the DMSO solvent shows  
 213 significantly suppressed hysteresis. These superior PV perform-  
 214 ance parameters can be clearly attributed to the absence of the  
 215 interfacial defects in the  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  HOIP thin films  
 216 processed using the DMSO solvent. The voids observed in  
 217 Figure 3C at the  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  thin film–substrate interface in  
 218 the DMF case are detrimental to photogenerated carrier  
 219 extraction. With regard to the ambient stability, the unstable  
 220 nature of the PSC processed using the DMF solvent can even  
 221 be witnessed by the naked eye. The “black”  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$   
 222 HOIP thin film, despite being sandwiched by the anode and  
 223 cathode, is bleached within 4 h (see Figure S5) in the ambient  
 224 atmosphere (temperature of  $\sim 25$  °C, relative humidity of  
 225  $\sim 40\%$ ). The rapid degradation of the  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  HOIP thin  
 226 film and the corresponding device performance (Figure 4B)  
 227 can be attributed to the interfacial voids that allow easy  
 228 ingress of moisture into the PSC at the interface. In contrast,  
 229 in the DMSO solvent case, the PSC still maintains  $>80\%$  of its  
 230 initial PCE after being exposed to the same ambient conditions  
 231 for 4 h (Figure 5B).

232 The microstructure-mediated  $\delta \rightarrow \alpha$  phase transformation  
 233 has several advantages in the fabrication of high-performance  
 234  $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$ -based PSCs. However, the grain size of the final  $\alpha$ -  
 235  $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  HOIP thin film is limited by the  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$   
 236 non-perovskite intermediate thin film. HOIP thin films with  
 237 larger grains are generally beneficial for PSC operation because  
 238 of the reduced grain boundary density.<sup>27</sup> To form a coarse-  
 239 grained  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  thin film, the as-formed  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$   
 240 intermediate thin film (processed with DMSO) is stored at RT  
 241 in a closed Petri dish for 12 h. This simple step leads to the  
 242 coarsening of  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  grains from  $\sim 200$  to  $\sim 600$  nm  
 243 without  $\delta$ -to- $\alpha$  phase transformation.<sup>28,29</sup> The surface mor-  
 244 phologies of the fresh and aged  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  thin films are  
 245 compared in panels A and B of Figure 6. The compact nature of  
 246 the  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  thin film is retained after the RT coarsening  
 247 process (Figure S7A). After conversion to  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$ , the  
 248 grain size is still  $\sim 600$  nm (Figure S6), which is much larger  
 249 than that ( $\sim 230$  nm) in the non-aged  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  HOIP  
 250 thin film (Figure 3B). Besides, the HOIP–substrate interface  
 251 retains its defect-free nature (Figure S7B), making it suitable for  
 252 PV application. Taking advantage of the larger grain size in the

final HOIP film, the relevant PSC shows a further enhanced  
 253 PCE of 16.4% (Figure 6C). The stabilized output at the  
 254 maximal power point ( $V = 0.88$  V) shows a PCE of 15.1%  
 255 under 1 sun illumination (Figure 6D). The incident photon-to-  
 256 current conversion efficiency (IPCE) spectrum was also  
 257 recorded for this device (Figure S8), showing an integrated  
 258  $J_{sc}$  of  $19.9$   $\text{mA}/\text{cm}^2$ , approaching the value extracted from the  
 259  $J$ - $V$  curve. Further effort is underway to achieve even larger-  
 260 grained  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  starting thin films for the “grain-  
 261 preserving”  $\delta \rightarrow \alpha$  phase transformation process, which will  
 262 lead to more efficient, stable PSCs. 263

In closing, we have shown that  $\delta \rightarrow \alpha$  phase transformation  
 264 has a profound impact on the morphology and microstructure  
 265 of the final  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  HOIP thin films, as well as the PV  
 266 performance of the resulting PSCs. By simply changing the  
 267 precursor solution solvent (DMF or DMSO) and performing  
 268 simple RT aging, we can tailor the microstructures of the  
 269 intermediate  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  non-perovskite thin film. Large-  
 270 grained  $\delta$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  thin films favor conversion to defect-free  
 271 and large-grained  $\alpha$ - $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  HOIP thin films via a  
 272 microstructure-mediated process. PSCs based on these HOIP  
 273 thin films show high efficiency and stability. The observations  
 274 and insights provided in this study have profound implications  
 275 for the understanding of the  $\delta \rightarrow \alpha$  phase transformation of  
 276 formamidinium-based HOIPs. It is worth noting that while  
 277  $\text{FAPbI}_3(\text{Cs})$  is studied as a representative composition in this  
 278 study, similar behavior can be expected in other formamidi-  
 279 nium-based compositions. In the future, we envision that more  
 280 effort will be devoted to decoupling the steps mentioned above  
 281 for accurate control of phase transformation of formamidi-  
 282 nium-based HOIP thin films, resulting in PSCs with further enhanced  
 283 performance and stability. 284

## ■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the  
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Experimental procedures, Figures S1–S8, and two  
 references (PDF)

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## 299 Notes

300 The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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