Nanoscale Phase Segregation in Supramolecular π -Templating for Hybrid Perovskite Photovoltaics from NMR Crystallography

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ABSTRACT: The use of layered perovskites is an important strategy to improve the stability of hybrid perovskite materials and their optoelectronic devices. However, tailoring their properties requires accurate structure determination at the atomic scale, which is a challenge for conventional diffraction-based techniques. We demonstrate the use of nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) crystallography in determining the structure of layered hybrid perovskites for a mixed-spacer model composed of 2-phenylethylammonium (PEA⁺) and 2-(perfluorophenyl)ethylammonium (FEA⁺) moieties, revealing nanoscale phase segregation. Moreover, we illustrate the application of this structure in perovskite solar cells with power conversion efficiencies that exceed 21%, accompanied by enhanced operational stability.

INTRODUCTION

Hybrid perovskite photovoltaics rival other solar cell technologies with their high performance at competitive cost. These systems are based on the AMX₃ composition that defines a corner-sharing crystal structure (such as the cubic lattice shown in Figure 1a) consisting of A cations, mainly Cs⁺, methylammonium (MA⁺, CH₃NH₃⁺) or formamidinium (FA⁺, CH(NH₂)₂⁺), as well as their mixtures, along with divalent M cations (such as Pb²⁺ and Sn²⁺), and halide anions (I⁻, Br⁻, Cl⁻). Their photovoltaic performances and widespread adoption are, however, compromised by limited stability. This can result in degradation due to reactivity with oxygen and water, as well as internal ion migration under operating conditions of voltage bias and light irradiation. ^{1,4,5} One of the emerging strategies to address these instabilities is based on the incorporation of layers of hydrophobic organic

cations between the hybrid perovskite slabs, to form layered two-dimensional (2D) perovskites. One example of this approach is the Ruddlesden-Popper perovskite phases based on the $S_2A_{n-1}M_nX_{3n+1}$ composition, where S^+ is a spacer cation (Figure 1b).6-9 These materials have shown greater resilience to degradation, yet their photovoltaic performance is impaired by the poor electronic properties of the spacer layers and by the lack of ordered supramolecular packing, which impedes overall crystallinity.^{6,7,10} The interactions between the organic moieties that form the spacer layer directly affect the structure of the resulting materials and, consequently, their optoelectronic properties.^{6,11} While progress has been made in the search for new organic moieties that can form layered perovskites, their assembly can only be controlled by having a thorough understanding of the noncovalent interactions which direct the supramolecular structure, such as hydrogen bonding, 12-15 van der Waals interactions, 9,16 metal coordination, ¹⁷ halogen bonding, ^{18,19} and π -based interactions. 20-23 Furthermore, to unravel these interactions, it is vital to accurately determine the atomic structure; this is a challenge for conventional diffraction techniques, due to polycrystallinity and the presence of heavy atoms.²¹

Solid-state nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy has previously been used to determine the local structure of hybrid perovskites and their composites with various organic molecules. ²⁴⁻²⁷ In particular, NMR crystallography, where the structure is determined by comparing the experimental NMR parameters to those calculated for trial structures, is a powerful tool for analyzing the organic assemblies and their templating effects in hybrid perovskite materials. ^{19,28}

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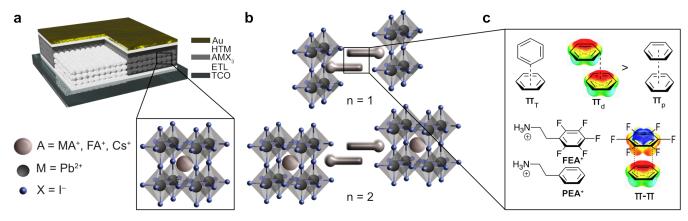


Figure 1. Supramolecular material design. (a) Schematic of the perovskite solar cell with the hybrid perovskite absorber material (AMX₃). HTM = hole transporting material; ETL = electron transporting layer; TCO = transparent conductive oxide. (b) Schematic representation of the structure of Ruddlesden–Popper phases of hybrid two-dimensional perovskites based on the $S_2A_{n-1}M_nX_{3n+1}$ formula (n = 1, 2, etc.) comprised of an organic spacer (S⁺) bilayer. (c) Top: Overview of possible π - π interaction modes between two arenes with comparable electron-density surfaces, with different interaction strengths ($\pi_T \approx \pi_d > \pi_p$). Lower: Arene–fluoroarene π - π interaction (π_p) and the spacer cations used in this study: 2-phenylethylamonium (PEA⁺) and 2-(perfluorophenyl)ethylamonium (FEA⁺). The π_p and π_d interactions of model systems are illustrated by the corresponding electrostatic potential (ESP) maps. ESP maps of PEA⁺ and FEA⁺ are shown in Figure S4 of the Supporting Information.

One of the most widely-employed organic moieties for layered perovskites is 2-phenylethylammonium (PEA+; Figure 1c), which interacts with the hybrid perovskite slabs via ion pairing and hydrogen bonding through the ammonium termini (-NH₃⁺).^{9,20,21,29} The assembly of the organic layer is directed by weaker van der Waals and π -based interactions between the organic moieties (Figure 1c), 11,20,30 which determine the relative orientation of the aromatic rings according to their quadrupole moments.31,32 The quadrupole moment of a benzene ring and the corresponding dispersion interactions stabilize two orientations, T-shaped (π_T) and parallel displaced (π_d) , which are more favorable than the parallel orientation (π_p ; Figure 1c, top).³² This is due to areas of positive and negative potential of the aromatic core, which can be visualized by the electronic density distribution or electrostatic potential (ESP) maps (Figure 1c and Figure S4 in the Supporting information, SI). Fluoroarenes, such as 2-(perfluorophenyl)ethylammonium (FEA+, Figure 1c), feature a reversed quadrupole moment due to the higher electronggativity of fluorine substituents, which favors parallel π interactions (π_p) in benzene–perfluorobenzene systems (Figure 1c, bottom).³² Parallel π – π stacking of the spacer cations could thus, in principle, be directed by employing alternating arene-fluoroarene moieties. 21,31 In addition, the presence of fluoroarene moieties could further contribute to the hydrophobicity of the material, improving its resilience to moisture, while fluoroarene anion- π interactions³³ could reduce halide ion migration, increasing the stability under device operating conditions.⁵ Therefore, supramolecular π assemblies of arenes and fluoroarenes could be used to control the properties of hybrid perovskites and their composites, although they remain underexploited in this context.

Here we use NMR crystallography in combination with molecular dynamics (MD) simulations, density functional theory (DFT), and X-ray diffraction to elucidate the atomic-level structure of the spacer cations in a model system that consists of PEA+ and/or FEA+ spacers (S+) in a typical layered 2D perovskite of S_2PbI_4 (n = 1) composition. Contrary to previous reports, we reveal that the arene-fluoroarene interactions of the systems studied here do not lead to templating of a uniform alternating structure, but instead the spacer layers form nanoscale phase-segregated domains. Furthermore, we find that this nanoscale supramolecular structure with mixedspacers enhances the performance of perovskite solar cells as compared to either of the components alone, which is accompanied by enhanced operational stability. We suggest that nanoscale segregation provides a new route for the design of layered hybrid perovskite systems. This new understanding is provided by the capacity of NMR crystallography to determine the atomic-level structure of the materials, which thus enables rational structure-activity-based design strategies applicable to other hybrid materials.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Hybrid perovskite thin films

This study focuses on the n = 1 model system with PEA⁺ and/or FEA⁺ spacers (S⁺) in a S₂PbI₄ layered 2D perovskite composition. Higher compositional representatives of Ruddlesden–Popper S₂A_{n-1}M_nX_{3n+1} systems (n > 1) commonly form mixtures of phases (known as quasi-2D perovskites) and are thus not well-defined.^{6,11} Moreover, we assessed 2D/3D composites with overlayers of the organic spacer(s)

on the 3D perovskite, which form a thin layer of a 2D phase upon annealing, which are relevant for photovoltaic applications. ^{12,34} For these materials, we have based our investigation on compositions comprising FA⁺ as the central A⁺ cation due to its higher thermal stability. ^{35,36}

Thin films of layered perovskites were prepared based on n=1 S₂PbI₄ compositions (S⁺ = PEA⁺, FEA⁺ and 1:1 PEA⁺:FEA⁺ denoted PF) as well as 3D (Cs_{0.05}FA_{0.95}MA_{0.1})PbI₃ perovskite thin films with a spacer overlayer of PEAI, FEAI or 1:1 PEAI:FEAI to form 2D/3D perovskite compositions on the surface, in accordance with the previous reports.³⁴

The structural properties of the resulting perovskite films were analyzed by X-ray diffraction (XRD) in a Bragg–Brentano configuration. XRD patterns of S_2PbI_4 compositions evidence the capacity of all of the spacers to form well-defined layered perovskite structures (Figure 2a). This is revealed by the presence of characteristic periodic patterns and low-angle reflections in the 2θ region below 10° that are associated with the basal (h00) planes.⁶ The (FEA)₂PbI₄ films also show additional reflections (e.g. around 2θ of 12.6°) that are associated with residual PbI₂.

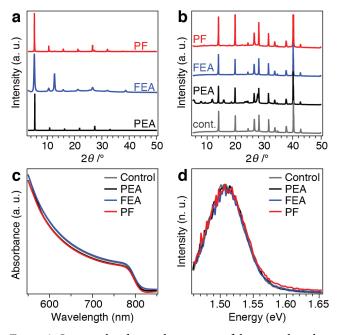


Figure 2. Structural and optical properties of the perovskite thin films. X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns of (a) layered 2D perovskite films of S_2PbI_4 composition and (b) 2D/3D perovskites ($S^+ = PEA^+$, FEA^+ and 1:1 PEA^+ : FEA^+ denoted PF) on microscopic glass slides. (c) UV-Vis absorption spectra and (d) steady-state photoluminescence (PL) spectra of 2D/3D perovskite films on microscopic glass slide. n.u. = normalized units; cont. = control.

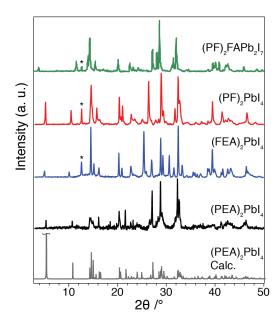


Figure 3: Powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD) patterns of mechanosynthesized layered hybrid perovskites of $S_2FA_{n-1}Pb_nI_4$ composition (S^+ = PEA $^+$, FEA $^+$ and 1:1 PEA $^+$:FEA $^+$ denoted PF). The calculated pattern for (PEA) $_2PbI_4$ is shown for the previously reported crystal structure. The major PbI $_2$ reflection is marked with an asterisk.

For the 2D/3D perovskites (Figure 2b), the overlayers of organic spacers do not substantially change the crystal structure of the 3D perovskite, as the characteristic signals remain unaltered. The PEA-based system features additional lowangle reflections in the region of 2θ below 10°, which are indicative of the formation of low-dimensional perovskite phases. 6 These signals were not, however, apparent for FEAand PF-treated perovskite thin films, most likely due to orientation or low crystallinity. The assemblies of the FEA+ and PF spacers on the 3D perovskite surface were therefore probed by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS), which confirms the presence of FEA+ on the surface of the hybrid perovskite through the appearance of F 1s core level signals (Figure S5 in the SI shows XPS data for control and treated samples). The F 1s binding energies for FEA- and PF-treated samples of 686.89 eV and 688.09 eV, respectively, indicate that the organic moieties engage in different binding modes on the surface of the hybrid perovskite. However, the spacer layers were not found to significantly alter the optical properties of the 3D perovskite, as demonstrated by the UV-Vis absorption and photoluminescence (PL) spectroscopy of the corresponding films (Figure 2c-d). This is beneficial for maintaining favorable optoelectronic features relevant to their application.

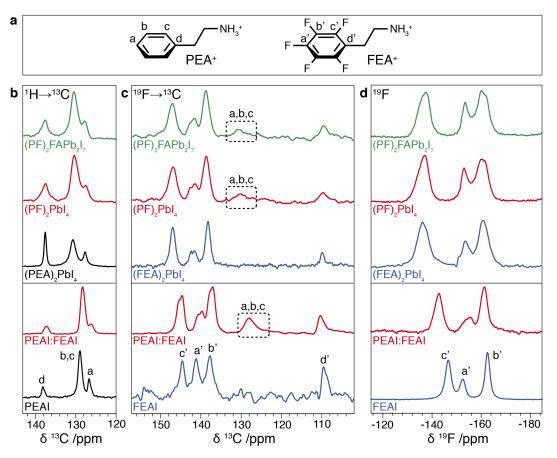


Figure 4. Solid-state NMR spectra of the spacer cations. (a) Structure of PEA⁺ and FEA⁺ cations with the corresponding 13 C and 19 F sites labelled. (b) 1 H \rightarrow 13 C CP, (c) 19 F \rightarrow 13 C CP and (d) direct 19 F MAS NMR spectra. The top half of the panels are spectra from the layered hybrid perovskites whereas the bottom half are from the neat spacer salts and their 1:1 mixture, following ball-milling. PF = 1:1 PEA⁺: FEA⁺. Signals arising from PEA⁺ in the 19 F \rightarrow 13 C CP spectra are highlighted in dashed boxes. Experimental parameters are given in Table S1, SI and detailed in the Experimental sections. Full 13 C spectra are shown in Figure S6.

In summary, the analysis of perovskite films of S_2PbI_4 (n=1) composition indicates that the spacer moieties (PEA+, FEA+ and their 1:1 mixture, PF) form layered 2D perovskite structures. Moreover, the presence of the spacer overlayer does not substantially affect the optoelectronic properties of the resulting 2D/3D perovskite films, which is beneficial for their application. Although XRD determines the layered 2D nature of the inorganic lattice, it is not sensitive to the structure of the organic spacer cation. The atomic-level structure was therefore investigated by solid-state NMR spectroscopy^{25,38-40} in conjunction with MD simulations and DFT calculations.

Elucidating the supramolecular structure

To analyze the bulk properties of the materials, powders of S_2PbI_4 composition (n=1; $S^+=PEA^+$, FEA^+ and PF) were prepared mechanochemically. YRD reveal that the crystalline low-dimensional perovskite structure is formed for all compositions, exemplified by the low angle reflections at around $2\theta = 5.2^\circ$ (Figure 3). These correspond to layer spac-

ings of 16.5 Å, 17.5 Å and 16.7 Å for (PEA)₂PbI₄, (FEA)₂PbI₄ and (PF)₂PbI₄, respectively, consistent with the trend observed for calculated structures (Figure S3). Many more reflections are seen than for the thin film samples, due to the lack of preferred orientation. The pattern for (PEA)₂PbI₄ is in good agreement with the previously reported crystal structure,³⁷ and similar patterns are observed for the other samples. The reflections at 2θ values of ~14–15 ° are consistent with in-plane Pb–Pb distances of ~6.1 Å. The (FEA)₂PbI₄ and (PF)₂PbI₄ samples show an additional reflection at 2θ of 12.6° which is ascribed to unreacted PbI₂, as also observed for the thin film (FEA)₂PbI₄ sample.

Comparison of the ${}^{1}H/{}^{19}F\rightarrow {}^{13}C$ cross polarization (CP) and direct ${}^{19}F$ NMR spectra in the aromatic regions of the spacer cations for the pure PEAI and FEAI precursors and for the layered 2D perovskites (Figure 4b–d) shows that the spacer environment changes upon formation of layered 2D perovskites. The ${}^{19}F$ spectra for pentafluorophenyl derivatives are well known; 41 the assignment of the ${}^{13}C$ signals for FEAI was determined by ${}^{19}F\rightarrow {}^{13}C$ heteronuclear correlation

(HETCOR) spectroscopy (Figure S7), whereas the assignment of the ¹³C signals for PEA⁺ was found by comparison with the calculated shifts, vide infra. Ball-milling a 1:1 mixture of PEAI and FEAI under comparable conditions to the mechanochemical preparation of the layered perovskite systems causes only relatively minor changes to the NMR spectra (Figure 4b–d, red spectra, bottom panels). This indicates that the sample adopts a similar structure to the neat spacer precursors. The atomic-level mixing between the phenyl moieties of the two components in the PEAI:FEAI sample is nevertheless clearly evidenced by the signal arising from the PEA⁺ carbons (labelled a-c, Figure 4a) in the ¹⁹F \rightarrow ¹³C CP spectrum (Figure 4c, dashed box). The ¹⁹F spectrum for PEAI:FEAI (Figure 4d) exhibits slightly different shifts compared to pure FEAI, due to the sensitivity of the ¹⁹F shifts to the modified structure. For the layered perovskites, clear differences are observed in the NMR spectra of the spacer cations, implying the formation of a new supramolecular structure (Figure 4b-d, top panels). The spectra for $(FP)_2Pb_2I_4$ (n = 1) and $(FP)_2FAPb_2I_7$ (n = 2) compositions are comparable, which implies that the organic structures are also very similar; this is expected, since the presence of a second layer of lead iodide octahedra should not significantly influence the spacer cations. Furthermore, for both systems the PEA⁺ carbons can be observed in the $^{19}\text{F} \rightarrow ^{13}\text{C}$ CP spectra (Figure 4c, dashed boxes), indicating atomic-scale mixing of the spacer cations, since CP transfer relies on through-space dipole–dipole interactions at the subnanometer length scale. However, the layered perovskites containing only a single type of spacer cation, namely $(PEA)_2PbI_4$ and $(FEA)_2PbI_4$, exhibit very similar spectra to the samples with mixed spacers. These observations can be explained by nanoscale segregation due to self-recognition or "narcissistic" self-sorting,⁴² which would result in the local environments remaining similar to the individual spacer structures, while still affording the atomic-level contact observed by $^{19}F\rightarrow ^{13}C$ CP. The broader signals in the mixed samples may thus correspond to the broader distribution of slightly different possible local environments experienced within nanodomains of the different spacer cations.

To test whether the results obtained for the bulk mechanosynthesised samples are also applicable to solution-processed thin films, the ${}^{1}H\rightarrow{}^{13}C$ spectrum was recorded for a thin film sample of $(FP)_{2}PbI_{4}$ after scraping off the substrate (Figure S6, top). Although the signal-to-noise ratio is relatively low due to the low sample mass, the aromatic signals for the spacer cations are observed with the same shifts as for the bulk $(FP)_{2}PbI_{4}$ sample, within a root-mean-squared error of 0.45 ppm. This indicates that the same supramolecular structure is adopted here for both the bulk and thin film layered perovskites.

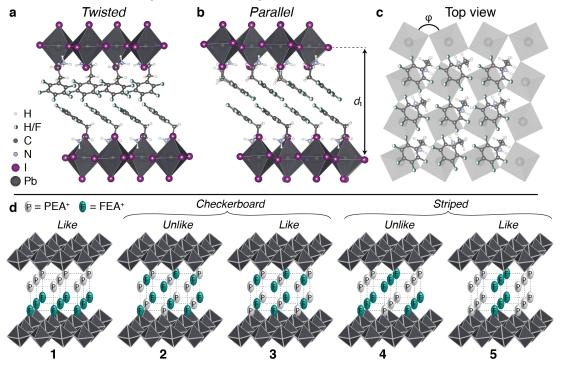


Figure 5. Trial structures for DFT calculations and NMR crystallography of S_2PbI_4 layered perovskites. (a, b) *Twisted* and *parallel* relative orientations of the aromatic rings in adjacent layers, and (c) top view of the spacer layer, showing the square lattice of interstices in the inorganic layer, all shown for the PEA_2PbI_4 composition. The interlayer spacing (d_1) and octahedral tilting (ϕ) are also indicated. (d) Schematic of different possible arrangements (1–5) of PEA^+ (P) and FEA^+ (F) moieties on the two opposing lattices representing the spacer bilayer within the layered perovskite.

To illuminate the atomic-level structure using the NMR data, the predicted chemical shieldings were calculated using DFT for different trial structures. These were then converted to chemical shifts using a regression obtained from a set of reference organic structures containing fluorine and iodine (for details refer to Sections S3–S5 in the SI). The n = 1structure was used for the comparison, since the organic cation structure is shared by higher order 2D/3D homologues. Trial structures were generated by selecting low energy structures from molecular dynamics simulations (detailed in Section S3, SI), some of which were based on previously reported crystal structures, 9,37,43,44 prior to geometry optimization using DFT. Structures with two different relative orientations of the spacer cation aromatic rings were considered: the "twisted" structure (Figure 5a), with a twist between the aromatic rings in the two opposing layers, resulting in predominantly π_T interactions (Figure 1c) and the "parallel" structure (Figure 5b), with aromatic rings from opposite layers aligned in parallel planes at 180° between the layers, allowing displaced parallel π_D interactions (Figure 1c). For (PEA)₂PbI₄, the experimental ¹³C shifts agree with the calculated shifts for the twisted structure better than for the parallel structure (Table S2). This observation is in agreement with the previously reported single crystal structure (CCDC no. 1542461)³⁷ and the slightly lower calculated DFT energy (Section S3, SI). For this analysis, only the aromatic carbons in the spacer cations were considered because the aliphatic carbons are close to the heavy Pb and I atoms and may require full relativistic treatment to obtain accurate shieldings. In contrast, for (FEA)₂PbI₄ the calculated ¹³C and ¹⁹F shifts for the *parallel* structure are in better agreement with experiment (Table S2), in accordance with the fact that the DFT energy is lower for the parallel structure (Section S3, SI).

For the mixed (PF)₂PbI₄ layered perovskite, there are many possible arrangements of the PEA+ and FEA+ spacers. Each lead iodide layer contains an array of tilted corner-sharing octahedra, resulting in a square lattice of rhombic interstices on each face in which the spacer cations reside (Figure 5c). We have considered the simplest representative examples of tiling the spacer cations over the two opposing lattices to form five trial structures (1-5, Figure 5d). In structure 1 each face comprises only a single type of spacer, while structures 2 and 3 have "checkerboard" arrangements of the cations on each face. In structure 2 the arrangements are offset so that unlike spacers are opposite each other (i.e. PEA⁺ is opposite FEA⁺), while structure 3 has like spacers opposing. Finally, structures 4 and 5 have *striped* arrangements of the spacers on each face with unlike- and like-pairing arrangements of the opposing spacers, respectively. In addition, we also consider a segregated model, where the shifts are calculated for the separate pure twisted (PEA)₂PbI₄ and parallel (FEA)₂PbI₄ structures, to imitate the environments in a nanoscale segregated structure that would form as a result of predominantly narcissistic self-sorting.

Figure 6 compares the experimental and calculated ¹³C and ¹⁹F chemical shifts for the five mixed (PF)₂PbI₄ structures, and the segregated model with the shifts from the pure (PEA)₂PbI₄ and (FEA)₂PbI₄ structures. The best agreement was found for a segregated model, and this is the only case for which the root-mean-squared errors (RMSE) between the calculated and experimental chemical shifts (Figure 6, insets) are less than the expected root-mean-squared error in DFT calculated shifts: 2.32 and 1.98 ppm for ¹³C and ¹⁹F, respectively, as estimated by the error in the calculated shifts for the external reference set. Bayesian analysis of the data with the Bayesian NMR tool⁴⁵ indicates that the segregated system matches the experimental data with 99.9% probability, which is also consistent with the experimental shifts for (FP)₂PbI₄ being very similar to those for (PEA)₂PbI₄ and (FEA)₂PbI₄.

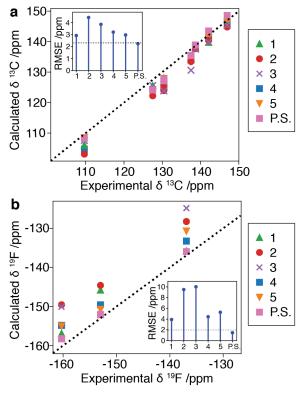


Figure 6. NMR shift calculations. Calculated aromatic (a) $^{13}\mathrm{C}$ and (b) $^{19}\mathrm{F}$ chemical shifts plotted against the experimental (FP)₂PbI₄ chemical shifts for structures **1–5** (Figure 5d) and a phase segregated model (P.S., the calculated shifts for pure (PEA)₂PbI₄ and (FEA)₂PbI₄). The dashed diagonal lines indicate exact agreement. The inserts show the root-mean-squared error (RMSE) between the calculated and experimental chemical shifts for each structure, and the horizontal lines are the expected error in DFT calculated shifts given by the RMSE in the regression set.

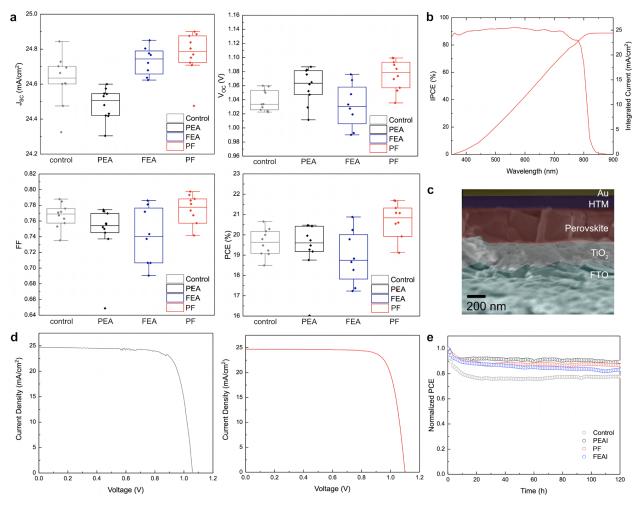


Figure 7. Photovoltaic performance and operational stability. **a** PV metrics of representative control and treated devices of aperture area of 0.16 cm² under full solar intensity at ambient temperature in reverse (from V_{OC} to J_{SC}) and forward bias with the PV metrics. J_{C} V curves are recorded at a scanning rate of 50 mV s⁻¹ under standard AM 1.5G solar radiation. **b** IPCE spectrum of the champion device with the projected photocurrent derived by integrating the IPCE over the spectral emission. **c** Cross-sectional SEM image of the photovoltaic device of FTO/cp-TiO₂/perovskite/Spiro-OMeTAD/Au architecture. **d** J_{C} V curves of champion control (left) and PF-treated (right) devices. **e** Evolution of the MPP over time upon 1 sun illumination in nitrogen atmosphere at 60 °C.

We therefore conclude that the layered hybrid perovskite structured formed by mixed PEA+ and FEA+ spacers comprises segregated domains of the two spacer moieties; however, since the PEA+ 13 C signals are observed in the 19 F \rightarrow 13 C CP spectrum (Figure 4c), the domains must be limited to the nanoscale. Although the opposite quadrupolar moments of the aromatic systems were expected to favor PEA+-FEA+ π interactions, the segregation may reflect the differing preferences of the two spacer cations to form twisted and parallel aromatic contacts, respectively (Figure 5a,b). Nevertheless, nanoscale mixing of the two spacers is observed, which may be entropically driven and is further supported by the single basal reflection observed by XRD (Figure 3), despite the pure layered 2D perovskites having different layer spacings (vide supra). As a result, the photovoltaic performance of the mixed system could be affected as compared to the pure system (vide infra) through a synergistic effect

Photovoltaic performance and stability

The photovoltaic performance of hybrid perovskites with overlayers of layered perovskites with the different spacer cations was investigated using devices with the conventional fluorine-doped tin oxide (FTO)/c-TiO₂ (40 nm)/ mp-TiO₂ (250 nm)/ perovskite (450 nm)/2,2',7,7'-tetrakis-(*N*,*N*-di-4-methoxyphenylamino)-9,9'-spirobifluorene(Spiro-

OMeTAD; 180 nm)/Au (80 nm) configuration to probe their utility (Figure 7a–d). The layer thicknesses were estimated by cross-sectional SEM imaging (Figure 7c and Figure S8) and the photovoltaic (PV) metrics were extracted from the current-voltage (J-V) characteristics (Figure 7a and Figure S9). The differences between the short-circuit currents (J_{SC}) for different compositions were found to be rather small, in the range of approximately 1%. This is in accordance with the minor changes in the optoelectronic properties of

the 2D/3D perovskite films (Figure 2c-d). DFT-calculated band gaps of S_2PbI_4 systems ($S^+ = PEA^+$, FEA^+ and FP; Figure S1) revealed that non-fluorinated systems have lower gaps, which coincides with their less pronounced octahedral tilting compared to the fluorinated systems (Figure S2), as well as lower interlayer distances (Figure S3). The current density obtained by integrating the incident photon-tocurrent efficiency (IPCE) as a function of wavelength for the champion device, 24.4 mA cm⁻², is in good agreement with the values obtained from the J-V data (24.8 mA cm⁻²), excluding any mismatch between the simulator and AM 1.5G light source (Figure 7b and Figure S9). Unlike the J_{SC}, the open-circuit voltages ($V_{\rm OC}$) of treated devices increased on average for PEA+ and PF systems by 30 mV and 45 mV, respectively, which is likely to be associated with the role of the spacer overlayer in passivating the surface defects. The improvement in $V_{\rm OC}$ resulting from a low-dimensional overlayer is in agreement with numerous previous studies. 25,46,47 However, while the fill factor (FF) of FEA+-treated devices decreased relative to the controls, it increased for PF-treated devices. As a result, the mean PCE of control, PEA+, FEA+ and PF-treated devices were 19.6%, 19.6%, 18.7% and 20.8%, respectively, with the champion device reaching an efficiency of 21.6 % for the PF-treated system (Figure 7a and Figure S10).

Notably, the performance of the mixed-spacer treated device, which we have determined to have a nanoscale-segregated structure of the spacer cations, shows a higher power conversion efficiency than with either spacer individually. We note, however, that the photovoltaic performances were not the primary objective of this study and were instead analyzed to illustrate the utility of this class of hybrid perovskites; therefore, further optimization of the corresponding devices can be envisaged. We further examined the effect of the overlayer on the operational stability of unencapsulated devices by monitoring the evolution of their maximum power point (MPP) under continuous irradiation of 1 sun in a nitrogen atmosphere (Figure 7e), which has previously been found to play a role in suppressing the degradation under operational conditions.^{48,49} While the initial performance of the control devices dropped to values below 80% after just 20 h of operation, the treated devices showed improved stability during this period of time, maintaining around 90% of their initial performance value after 100 h of operation. These performance and stability improvements indicate the potential of such mixed-spacer layered perovskites in perovskite photovoltaics, which should stimulate further investigations.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we present a systematic NMR crystallography approach based on solid-state NMR spectroscopy and computational analysis to elucidate the supramolecular structure of the organic spacer layer for layered hybrid perovskites.

Specifically, a mixed arene–fluoroarene model system was studied, for which we find that although there is atomic-level contact between the spacers, the structures most closely resemble those of the endmembers, implying nanoscale segregation. We illustrate the application of this system in enhancing the performance and stability of perovskite solar cells and demonstrate that the performance is greater than for either of the spacers individually. In general, we envisage that NMR crystallography will play an important role in determining the supramolecular structure of layered hybrid perovskites, facilitating molecular design of spacer systems driven by an understanding of their assemblies, thereby advancing the properties and applications of hybrid materials.

EXPERIMENTAL

Layered perovskite thin films were deposited on microscope glass slides from a 0.5 M precursor solution by spin-coating, followed by annealing at 120 °C for 15 mins. 2D/3D thin films similarly prepared by spin-coating with a 1.5 M perovskite precursor solution, followed by annealing at 120 °C for 10 min and 100 °C for 40 min, before spin-coating an overlayer with a 30 mM solution of the spacer precursor in isopropanol at ambient temperature, followed by annealing at 110 °C for 5 min. Full synthetic details are provided in Sections S1 of the SI. Details on device characterization are given in Section S2.

Bulk layered perovskite powders were prepared by mechanosynthesis according to previous protocols.^{39,50}

Solid state NMR spectra were recorded at 9.4, 11.7 or 21.1 T. Full details are given in Section S3 and Table S1. Samples were annealed at 150 °C before recording the NMR.

Trial structures for the layered perovskites were determined from molecular dynamics simulations and DFT calculations following an analogous procedure as previously reported.⁵¹ Details are provided in Section S3 and S4.

NMR crystallography was used to determine the structure of the organic spacers and the chemical shifts were calculated for the different trial structures using DFT (Section S6).

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NOTES

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