

### **Dining on innovation By Stephen Smith BBC Newsnight 2006/01/04**

Try to imagine the nerve-centre of Silicon Valley, USA, and you might picture pristine labs where young men and women in anti-static tabards move soundlessly through the rinsed and mote-free air.

Or is that just me?

In any case, you'd be a lot closer to reality if you were to conjure up a modest little roadhouse instead.

5 Yes, the sizzling griddle at Buck's Diner is the unlikely crucible for the very latest in innovation.

Indeed, it's not going too far to say that if you dropped the proverbial bomb on the joint at breakfast-time, it would probably alter the future of technology on the planet. Now that's something to chew on.

Every morning finds hotshot inventors pitching their ideas to venture capitalists (VCs) over coffee and waffles. The mise-en-scene is a cross between "Weird Science" and "The Player".

10 **Parking lot proposition**

Steve Jervetson, whose Armani suit announces him as a VC, sees himself as a talent scout.

"In some ways it's like Hollywood," he says. "You get a script or business plan and you have to go with your gut - meeting the people is the important thing."

Regulars say the buzz in the diner recalls the good old, bad old days of the original Internet boom, when Jervetson was once

15 pursued out of the restaurant and across the parking lot by an Eskimo with a proposition.

"Back in the nineties things got so frenzied people would come from out of town," says Jamis McNiven, the proprietor and maitre d' of Buck's. "There was this Eskimo from Florida called Nan Omo who turned up in a three-piece suit and chased Steve down the street. Steve thought he was being served with court papers but in fact it was a business plan."

**Net good fortune**

20 For the moment at least, Jervetson and friends can digest the chef's special without being harassed by Inuits, but don't be fooled. Everyone's on the lookout for the next big thing.

The sense of expectancy has been stimulated by an astonishing run of good fortune at Google, the Internet search giant.

At their "campus" in the heart of the valley, Google have successfully made satellite map technology accessible to the ordinary home computer-user.

25 Marissa Mayer, who has been with Google since the dark ages of computers - oh, seven years ago - told Newsnight what we can expect from her colleagues in 2006 and beyond.

"I think that search in particular has really just gotten started. I think we're going to see whole new ways of presenting results, richer types of results so maybe sometimes an image is the best answer, maybe a video.

"I'm really excited with seeing us evolve to presenting the user with more than just 10 weblinks at a time."

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