

VALLEY GIRLS



They're storming Silicon Valley with their sharp ideas. Meet six American Indian women who are paving their way to technological superstardom with their ambition and aptitude. By AARTI VIRANI and PARIZAAD KHAN SETHI

Photographed by THAYER ALLYSON GOWDY

Styled by KIERSTEN ANN



VOGUE

Skirt, vest;
both **Sara
Shepherd**.
Shoes, **Alaïa**
at Barneys

POORNIMA VIJAYASHANKER, 32, FOUNDER, FEMGINEER.COM

Poornima Vijayashanker started young. Her immigrant parents' funds didn't stretch to cover day care, so two-year-old Vijayashanker tagged along to San Jose State University with her dad. She sat on the classroom floor playing with castoff diagrams while he got his engineering degree. At nine, she was clattering away on her mom's electronic typewriter, with internet mastery following soon after.

Growing up in Texas, Vijayashanker didn't think she would end up an entrepreneur in Silicon Valley. "Even though I loved tech, I always thought of it as a hobby." She went to college intent on being a lawyer but changed majors once there. "I realised that [law] was not creative but engineering was, so I took my first computer science course." Eventually, she succumbed to the startup bug and became founding engineer at *Mint.com*, a personal finance management service, which was later acquired by Intuit.

Today, Vijayashanker has come full circle—her website *Femgineer.com* is an education resource for tech professionals, offering online courses on everything from mobile product development to communication skills. Femgineer started as a blog in 2007 as an outlet for Vijayashanker's twin passions—writing and engineering—and to show that women in engineering didn't have to conform to the nerd label. As requests started pouring in asking her to teach and mentor, she started teaching in an online format. Today, to reach more people, the course follows a more self-study format.

DREAM INNOVATION: "A biotech company focused on life extension."