

their ideas being stolen. "We had to convince entrepreneurs they could work with us," says David Drummond.

Those who can get comfortable with Google Ventures gain access to resources no amount of money can buy. The firm can, and does, introduce its startup founders to anyone at Google—experts on rankings on Google search, for example, or user experience designers or Android mobile-app builders. One startup was offered 1 million hours of core processing time on the Google cloud for free.

A big edge for Google Ventures is its design team. Maris drew top tech talent out of Google and made them partners in the fund. One worked on Gmail; another helped redesign YouTube. They form a sort of SWAT team for startups. In what's known as a design sprint, they can troubleshoot whatever is ailing a startup—a flailing app, slow Web traffic, an uninspiring home page. (See "On the Clock," above.)

"We didn't need the money," says Ryan Caldbeck, co-founder of the crowdfunding startup CircleUp. He picked Google Ventures as one of his backers in part to gain access to its design talent. Twitter co-founder Ev Williams used the design team for his new publishing platform, Medium. Stewart Butterfield, co-founder of Flickr, used the team for his new startup, Slack.

Still, navigating the line between startups and Google can get complicated. Last year, Google wanted to buy Nest, whose signature product is a WiFi-connected, learning home thermostat.

Google Ventures recused itself from the negotiations, allowing the other VC firms invested in Nest to broker a price of \$3.2 billion. (It was the fourth-largest venture exit of 2014.) In February, Bloomberg reported that Google was planning a ride-sharing app that would be a direct competitor to Uber. Google Ventures has had a stake in Uber since 2013. If Google and Uber go to war, Maris will be right in the middle of it.

"Google Ventures has a direct financial incentive to ensure the companies we invest in succeed," Maris said in an e-mail responding to questions about potential conflicts. "Our investment decisions are made independent of Google's product road map." He and the other partners are paid carried interest based on the performance of portfolio companies. In theory, if Google's car app kills Uber, Google Ventures loses money.

One evening in San Francisco, a group of young scientists and doctors are sitting down to dinner. "I remember when Max was living with me and I opened up my fridge and saw this stuff he put in there. I was thinking, Is this safe?" muses Blake Byers, a 30-year-old with a Ph.D. in bioengineering from Stanford and a partner at Google Ventures. He casts a sideways glance at Max Hodak, a 25-year-old Duke biomedical engineering grad sitting next to him. Three years ago, Hodak started working in Byers's garage to build a robot-enabled laboratory. Once he stored chemicals in Byers's freezer. ("Blake gets a little carried away with that story," says Hodak. "There was never any danger.")

Hodak now runs Transcriptic, a company that builds and operates robot-run labs in shipping container-sized boxes. It packs them with enough computing power to run multiple experiments from anywhere in the world. Theoretically, a scientist in Monrovia, Liberia, with access to a laptop or a mobile phone could use a Transcriptic lab to test strains of Ebola. Byers, who is the son of Brook Byers of Kleiner Perkins, has helped Hodak raise \$12.5 million from Google Ventures and others.

"We are just on the verge of what science and technology can do," says David Shaywitz, chief medical officer of DNAnexus, who's seated across from Byers and Hodak. His company, also backed by Google Ventures, is building a global bank of genomic information using cloud computing.

Listening to the scientists gathered around the table, it's hard not to get caught up in the world they see coming. In this vision of our future, science will be able to fix the damage that the sun or smoking or too much wine inflicts on our DNA.

Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other scourges of aging will be repaired at the molecular level and eradicated. In the minds of this next generation of entrepreneurs, the possibilities are bizarre and hopeful and endless. We probably won't live forever, but we could live much longer, and better.