

# WAY DOWN IN THE VALLEY

Amr Mohsen started a tech outfit, got rich—and then self-destructed



**H**E SEEMED TO BE THE epitome of the Silicon Valley success story. A brilliant Egyptian engineering student, Amr Mohsen breezed through the California Institute of Technology doctoral program and now holds 40 patents for engineering technology. In 1989, with the backing of well-heeled venture capitalists, he created Aptix Corp., whose technology allows manufacturers to quickly turn designs into prototypes. The company also made Mohsen a wealthy man, with a \$10-million, 17-acre hilltop estate in posh Los Gatos sporting its own driving range. "He is a genius and well-respected," says Mohamed Abdou, a University of California at Los Angeles professor and friend.

But in a story of self-destruction that has shocked even his closest friends, the 55-year old father of three sits today in a San Francisco lockup because he allegedly tried to flee the country while awaiting trial on charges

in May, 2003, he was nabbed by FBI agents on Mar. 27 in a parking lot with \$40,000 in cash and a newly issued Egyptian passport that violated his bail agreement. Now he has also been charged with contempt of court for trying to flee. Mohsen's trial is set for May 10. He has pled not guilty to perjury, obstruction, mail fraud, and the contempt charges.

Mohsen's downfall began in 1998. Then chief executive of struggling Aptix, he licensed its key technology to software giant Mentor Graphics Corp. for \$1 million in cash and \$3 million in loans—and Mentor's assurances that it would sue Aptix' stronger rival, Quickturn Design Systems for infringing on a 1989 patent that Mohsen had been granted. But then things took an ugly turn. Quickturn's lawyers found pages of embellished technical information in a notebook that Mohsen said he used to document his 1989 patent.

The added pages were not in a copy of the notebook that Mohsen's patent lawyers from the decade before



**IN JAIL** The FBI nabbed Mohsen

**DASHED DREAM** Mohsen's 17-acre Los Gatos estate is worth \$10 million

the 1989 notebook suggested. All this later prompted a federal judge, William H. Alsup, to throw out the case about the 1989 patent—and require Aptix to pay Quickturn's \$4.2 million in legal fees. Mohsen and his lawyer declined to comment on the civil suit or criminal charges.

## KEYSTONE KOPS

MOHSEN HAD MADE matters worse in his patent case with a series of alleged miscues worthy of the Keystone Kops. After initially refusing to hand over key documents to Quickturn's lawyers, Mohsen testified he brought the notebooks to his office—but then mistakenly left them in a bag on the floor of his Mercedes. That evening, he told the court, thieves broke his car window and swiped the bag. But Quickturn's investigators argued Mohsen staged the break-in himself, a claim the judge agreed with in his ruling. Mohsen also testified that a year later, an unknown good samaritan mailed him scraps of the

stolen notebooks found in his backyard. That, too, was dismissed by the judge in his ruling. "None of the documents showed any signs of weathering," Alsup wrote. Mohsen took the fifth when questioned in court on these allegations.

By June, 2000, Alsup had thrown out the patent lawsuit and later referred the case to the U.S. Attorney's office in San Francisco, which filed a 15-count indictment for perjury against Mohsen. With the start of his trial nearing several weeks ago, prosecutors became alarmed when Mohsen asked permission to refinance his home and collect \$1 million. When the court required the money be used to pay Aptix' legal bills, he showed no further interest. Trailing Mohsen for the next two days, FBI agents arrested him after he allegedly booked a flight to the Cayman Islands.

Today, Mohsen's company is close to bankruptcy and he is no longer CEO. His family is selling off whatever it can from his glitzy estate, says one associate. For