

*Who Cares (Who) Wins?*

**Fred Linney**

It soon dawned on Heron-Mazy, known as the *Altered Architecture* duo, that within half an hour of arrival in New York, they were ultimately of little use to the Institution that had awarded them first prize in an international architectural ideas competition. The competition, to design a White House for the future, or then for that moment the present White House might have been blown up, turned out to attract well over 500 entrants globally. Why such a number would be keen to try this out, no one really knew, but Heron-Mazy's project, set deep underground with multiple entrances and exits, with a car-altering workshop deep beneath the White House lawn, seemed to trigger something off with the judges. The strangely titled *Revenge of the Lawn* by Heron-Mazy was awarded First Prize.

The White House Redux awards ceremony was down on a sliver of a building on Kenmare Street in New York. Mazy had been late flying in from Texas and had to schlep his luggage from Newark via an airport bus. He wasn't best pleased so they decided to take a cab down 2<sup>nd</sup> in the evening traffic. The building, if you can call it that, really was a sliver, nothing more than a shop front, a storefront. Thick concrete panels had been designed to pivot outward onto the street as a series of louvers. These louvers opened, swiveled and enlarged what was really, only a corridor. What architects call: the *6ft deep space!*

By 7.15 the 6ft deep space and the street outside hosted, what some young dudes would keep repeating to Heron-Mazy later, a kick-ass opening. Heron and Mazy were not exactly sure what kick-ass opening meant: possibly the free beer dispensed from huge gardening containers bought from Walmart or possibly the chance to feel part of the New York retro-beat and beanie scene. Heron, fresh from Landi Kotal on the Afghan border to pick up the prize, hadn't long exited the yellow cab when he noticed Mr Alam standing next to one of the swivel panels, beer in hand. Beside him, his roll-on full of shirting material samples. Mr Alam was the C.E.O of the company *Sexing the Shirt* which Heron had ghosted some years back. Later Mr Alam would tell Heron: this is as bad as it gets in New York, in America. Hair shorter, combed forwards, it took Heron a moment to recognize his old friend from Lahore.

Mr Alam, 'Shabs' to his friends, couldn't quite believe what was going on. How was Mr Heron, lover of Lahore, Shalimar breather, Sufi and frequent traveler to Peshawar, here in New York? And how on earth had Mr Heron, as he was known in the shirt business, won a competition to re-design the White House? If Shabs needed any further sign of a meltdown, this was it. The world was upside down, inside out and he had to find a way to escape forwards not backwards. *Sexing the Shirt* had lost millions on the market that week and Shabs was looking to rectify his investment. If only he knew how.

Later, as the kick-ass opening kicked ass, Heron explained how the *Revenge of the Lawn* project was really a short film with a series of potential architectures embedded in the script. The idea for the American President's residence and office was to be an underground bunker; scaled up significantly of course. Not a long way from base camp in Kandahar, then! Mr Alam nodded. His friend Hamad Karzai would think the same. Good job, son, the C.E.O of Sexing the Shirt said. He always called Heron 'son' and this was how he had introduced him to Tariq. This is Heron, friend of the family, no, one of the family. Shabs meant the family in Lahore and Peshawar. When is the prize-winning presentation? Shabs asked. Don't know, Heron replied. Nor me, Mazy said. We haven't a clue what's going on. Who cares who wins? Shabs turned to his Muslim banker friend. The two Muslims laughed; not at America, not at the President of America or Afghanistan, but at the inside out absurdity of everything around them. New York was turning into Karachi into Mumbai before their eyes.

Is it bad, this meltdown? Heron asked Tariq just as Mazy went for two more beers from the ice pool. Bad, it's worse. An inestimable amount of money, indescribable amounts of money are resting only on 15 trillion. It's like an inverse pyramid. 15 trillion is holding it all up. If that goes boom, it all goes. Heron smiled. Down was the only way up today. Mazy returned with the beer and headed off to find some of his students who had appeared out of the New York woodwork for the evening. Pleased to see their old professor they shouted: Yo Mazy, way to go, first prize eh, some kick-ass digital there dude! Mazy grinned sheepishly. He hadn't been address by 'yo' for at least a decade. What was happening: was the world reversing or were the dudes stuck in scratch mode?

Doom City! Heron suggested. Hell, Tariq replied, a hell of our own making, no one else's. For a banker that was a fair confession. But and Tariq went on, if the same dumbness now lies broken as everything else which led to the war in Iraq and now Afghanistan then hell, the stupidity of everything else is not only a possibility but a certainty. Tariq, from Peshawar, knew one hell from another. He had lived through suicide bombings and had just escaped the Hotel Marriott explosion in Islamabad. His meeting had been moved to an Afghan café in Jinnah Market instead of the hotel. Mark my words, it will be Bombay next, Mumbai, Tariq said. And that will only be the beginning. The world has forgotten the one area that has constantly been aflame, Kashmir. Boom, the two Muslims said, as they turned smiling and shaking Heron's hand for the fifth time. Congrats man, Shabs said, when are you coming back to Lahore to design some shirts for me? We need to get *Sexing the Shirt* back on the road again.

Suddenly to the left out on the New York street, yellow taxis passing and cruising close to the cyber-chicks' thighs, a ladder was brought out. Someone else brought a microphone out. Could this be it, the big moment of Heron-Mazy? Mazy, sensing that public moment, which he so often did his best to avoid, slunk off to find his students once more. Shabs pushed Heron forwards: Go, man, it's your turn, you're famous now. You've designed the new White House. Slowly as some inaudible announcements were being made in the New York street, taxis honking and general dude ass-kicking all around, the second prize winners were applauded, and the microphone went back to a dude in Britpop black v-neck sweater, white school shirt and thin pencil tie.

*And the first prize goes to...*the dedicated follower of British fashion looked around...he realized he didn't know the first prize winners. He'd never seen them. He'd not bothered to find them. He hadn't a clue whether they were there, here or not. *Who cares who wins*, he muttered under his breath and began again...*the first prize goes to* - he paused, cleared his throat and looked up into god-knows-what-sky-was-left-in-that-newyork-evening and announced: *Heron-Mazy for the Revenge of the Lawn. Are they here?*

At this point Mr Heron moved through the front layer of humans as if cutting through virtual liquid, took the microphone and mounted the ladder. Shabs whistled, Tariq went, Go Heron go! There was nothing to say. Heron knew not who he was thanking, knew not who was there who mattered or who was to present the check. Who cares who wins, he thought. He spoke slowly into the microphone: 'My grandmother in her own way, shines like a beacon down the stormy American past.' That's what our new White House would do, Heron continued, so let's take revenge on the lawn now.

*Shine like a beacon down the stormy American present.* The kick-ass dudes went wild. There were whoops and yelps. Christ man, one dude said, how did you do it? How did you come up with that? Fuckin' brilliant digital bitch moves, man. What was he talking about? Heron had no idea. What did this all mean? Not far away Wall Street had become Fall Street.

In Washington, a swarm of bees would attack the peaches in the garden of the Future President. The peaches would fall on the rock-hard ground because the lawn had been neglected. The lawn in anger would eventually take revenge. The bees would attack the incoming car forcing the driver to take cover but failing to stop him crashing into the White House and detonating the charge. *Cool, your project was the coolest*, black-neck-tie-v-neck-sweater hair-dude was shouting to Heron through the noise.

The dedicated follower of fashion tried to shake his hand. Heron smiled. The check was discretely put into his hand and Heron slipped back between the curtain of young dudes and cyber-chicks who all wanted more. He had lost Mazy. He had tried to call for Mazy from the ladder, but Mazy was nowhere to be seen. Mazy never did like the public attention.

This wasn't the only first prize Mazy had won, but it would be, he said later in the flea-ridden hotel room on 39th, probably the last. Not because Heron-Mazy, now this famous Altered Architecture duo, would be unable to do competitions anymore. But they knew, in such a fragmenting world the world was looking elsewhere. Heron turned from the travel bed and quietly said to Mazy: we may be forced to take revenge on the very thought of architecture if we are to get any of ideas through to the next generation.

Next day, as Heron-Mazy took a New York lunch of pizza and iced coffee, in a small garden on 8<sup>th</sup> street, the revenge would go on. There, Astrid Dubord would talk of her uncle and how he was so misunderstood by the social scientists, those engineers who keep cutting up the wrong city. Over margarita, pesto and prosciutto, the world was again laid bare and about to take revenge on its own pretence. Ms Dubord continued about the 21<sup>st</sup> century palazzo designed and bought by the controlling mafia of New York's architecture. Mazy glazed over, about to pop another anti-depressant. If he'd stayed in New York after school, Mazy said later as they emerged out of Grand Central Station the wrong way, I'd either be a recluse and famous or then dead. In all ways, Heron said, you'd be mad.

They laughed. Heron looked into Ms Dubord's eyes. He wondered. Would she? Then he thought about asking her to leave into the sunset with him. Come to Peshawar, he said to her. Not likely, she said, the most dangerous city in the world, I might get kidnapped or shot. True enough, Heron smiled at her and kissed her as they parted their lunch date on the steps of the apartment on 8<sup>th</sup> street. Heron-Mazy made for the Village Cinema and caught the film on Barney Rossett the founder of Grove Press. As Barney R. talked about Ginsberg and Howl, it suddenly looked as if someone would rip the top open of this city, stuff all the entrails, pretence and fraudulence back down into the underground system and close off the new White House.

Mazy took the check from his pocket and unfolded it. Just as in those porcelain urinals, he noticed a bee drawn in the corner of the check. He hadn't noticed it before. Then, just as suddenly, the check caught alight, and Mazy barely had time to throw it on the floor of the Village Cinema before it burned him. *Who cares who wins*, Heron said, and the unknown architects smiled to themselves in deep kick-ass satisfaction. They were not mad yet.

*Fred Linney, Marfa Herald, Texas 23.4.09*

*(for more details see [www. heron-mazy.net](http://www.heron-mazy.net))*