

The Photographer's Story

TYLER HAUGHEY



The old JERSEY SHORE

I've spent the last two years documenting the Mid-century Modern motels of the Wildwoods, a group of shore towns on a five-mile island in southern New Jersey. Built in the '50s and '60s and virtually unchanged, they form the largest concentration of postwar resort architecture in the US. As a native of the Jersey Shore, I've always been interested in the coast's history and buildings, and when I happened upon the Wildwoods one winter, I felt like I'd travelled back in time. The motels represent the way American families used to vacation – with the rise of car culture and a new landscaped highway sparking a massive migration to the area. More than 300 motels were built, influenced by European Modernism and Miami Beach – though in the last 20 years, half have been knocked down. Come summer, they're still packed with people, but for nine months of the year, they have no choice but to close. This is when I shoot – with all distractions stripped away, their characters can really shine through. Each motel is different, decorated to set itself apart and attract motorists, with bright colours, neon signs and the iconography of exotic, faraway destinations. I love that so many are able to continue on and thrive, as time capsules of summers past.

TYLER HAUGHEY is an American photographer. See more work at tylerhaughey.com and [@tylerhaughey](https://www.instagram.com/tylerhaughey)



As well as their bright, fun colour schemes, a lot of motels – such as the Gold Crest Resort Motel here – have amenities like pools and mini golf to attract families. →

The Dawn & Nova Motel faces east, which is probably the reason for its name. The signage is original, and with its minimal structures and poured concrete, it really evokes that Mid-century Modern feeling.



I love this sweet, handmade sign I spotted at the Olympic Island Beach Resort. It really speaks to the fact that so many of these motels are owned by families, not companies or corporations.



The Lollipop Motel has one of the most famous signs, and nearly every door is painted in a different colour – it has an almost comic strip feel. Built in 1959, it nostalgically captures the feel of '50s culture.



This overturned chair at the Barcelona Motel is very evocative of the off-season – blown over in the wind, it's awaiting the return of summer to be flipped. It's also vintage, and hints at the attentive way motels are trying to keep the era alive. →



Motels with names like the Monaco, the Malibu and the Caribbean are common – taking a sophisticated, far-off destination that middle-class families could never afford, and bringing it to them in New Jersey.



Monaco

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Philadelphia has the closest major airport to the Wildwoods, a 1½-hour drive away. American, BA and Delta fly there from Glasgow, Heathrow and Manchester (from £430; ba.com). Newark is 2½ hours from the Wildwoods and has a wider choice of flights. Inter-city buses serve the Wildwoods, most frequently during the summer season. For a complete guide to accommodation and sights, visit wildwoods.nj.com. Learn more about the motels at the Doo Wop Experience, which includes a guided tour of landmarks, plus resources for self-guided tours (doowopusa.org). ¹⁰