



Ebb Tide // Tyler Haughey

By Christian Michael Filardo

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Tyler Haughey (b. 1988, Ocean Township, NJ) received a Bachelor of Science in Photography and Art History from Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA. He was awarded an Individual Artist Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts in 2015, and was selected for inclusion in Photolucida's Critical Mass Top 50 in 2016. Recent exhibitions include the NJSCA Fellowship Exhibition at Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ; the 2015 Summer Group Show at Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY; and Project Basho's ONWARD Compé 2015, Philadelphia, PA, which was juried by Elinor Carucci. He lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

The Wildwoods, a group of small shore towns situated on a five-mile-long barrier island along the southern New Jersey coastline, are home to one of the most important architectural collections of the 20th century. They contain a trove of midcentury modern motels that make up the largest concentration of postwar resort architecture in the United States. These motels remain fully functioning and virtually unchanged since their original construction, in many cases over fifty years ago.

Adopting a spare aesthetic and using contemporary materials such as poured concrete and glass, the motels brought European high modernism to America's middle class. Applying the idea of the "decorated shed", a term coined by renowned postmodern architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steve Izenour in their seminal 1972 book *Learning from Las Vegas*, each motel relies on unique architectural features and symbolic ornament to form its own identity and set itself apart from the others nearby. Infused with space-age optimism and experimentation, and utilizing the iconography of faraway, exotic destinations, these structures represent the way America's middle class traveled and vacationed during the postwar era.

Built to cater to the annual influx of summer tourists that began vacationing in the area in the mid-1950s, the motels have always faced a steep decline in visitors during the rest of the year, leaving most with no choice but to close for the off-season. Normally vibrant and full of life, they sit shuttered and vacant for nine months every year, acting as unoccupied time capsules of summers past. Their boldly-colored facades, futurist details, and exuberant neon signage sit in stark contrast against the eerie, unpopulated emptiness of the winter months, transforming these beach towns into real life abandoned film sets.

In the late 1990s, Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour visited The Wildwoods to study the motels. During this time, Izenour spearheaded a multi-university research studio, aptly titled *Learning*

from The Wildwoods, which documented the buildings in hopes of protecting and preserving them. Many of these structures, however, struggling from inhabiting the gray area between the past and present, have recently become less valued and have fallen victim to the condominium boom that has affected countless coastal communities. More than half of the 300-plus motels that once stood have been sold and demolished, making way for conventional, high-rise constructions. The condos are an ever-looming presence, imposing on the landscape and acting as a reminder that any number of the remaining motels could suffer the same fate at any time.

“As a native of the Jersey Shore, both the vernacular architecture of the eastern seaboard as well as the off-season vacancy of a tourist destination are themes of great interest to me. With this project, I explore and document how places designed and known for fostering fun and family-oriented memories look when they are deserted and void of any life. I aim to show these historic sites in a new light, while at the same time bringing awareness of them to a wider audience.”