

# CREATIVE BOOM

## Photographs of Glorious Midcentury Motels in New Jersey During the Winter Months

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*Creative Boom*

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Situated in The Wildwoods, a group of small shore towns on a five-mile-long barrier island, the postwar resorts have been captured by photographer Tyler Haughey in his series, Ebb Tide.

"They contain a trove of midcentury modern motels that make up the largest concentration of postwar resort architecture in the United States," Haughey explains. "They remain fully functioning and virtually unchanged since their original construction, in many cases over fifty years ago."

Back then, they considered the use of materials and kept things to a minimum with poured concrete and glass bringing European high modernism to America's middle class. Their design focused around the idea of a 'decorated shed', a term coined by renowned postmodern architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven 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," Haughey continues. "Infused with space-age optimism and experimentation, and utilising the iconography of faraway, exotic destinations, these structures represent the way American families vacationed during the postwar era."

The motels were built to cater for an annual influx of summer tourists that began holidaying in the area in the mid-1950s. But they then 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 empty time capsules of summers past. Their boldly coloured 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."

The architects Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour also visited The Wildwoods to study the motels and together launched a university research studio in the hope of protecting and preserving them. Alas, since then, more than half of the 300 motels that once stood have been sold and demolished, making way for conventional, high-rise condominiums.

Haughey adds: "As a native of the Jersey Shore, I am greatly influenced by the vernacular architecture, seasonal economy, and off-season vacancy of a tourist destination. This project explores the fleeting moments that occur at places designed and known for summer recreation."