

## CATSKILLS PHOTOGRAPHER UNCOVERS THE FORGOTTEN WORLD OF THE BORSCHT BELT

**Marisa Scheinfeld Documents the Transformed Landscapes & Buildings of the Once Vibrant Vacation Destination**

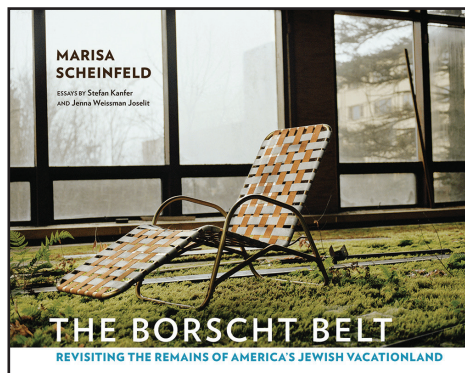
*"On the deserted grounds of these former retreats I have found an enchanting solitude—a seclusion that is empty and uncontrolled. Yet the stillness is deceptive. What appears to be abandoned is actually full of life and activity. One act of animated history has ended, but, as any visitor to these sites quickly learns, new acts have begun. Guest rooms have become sanctuaries for birds. Leafy ferns have pushed their way through foundations and floors. Overgrown shrubs and tangled weeds have swallowed staircases."—from the Prologue*

Growing up in the Catskills, Marisa Scheinfeld spent many a summer day swimming in the pools and lakes of Sullivan and Ulster County, home to the once bustling resort area of hotels and bungalows affectionately known as the Borscht Belt. Surrounded by beautiful mountains and sublime natural beauty, she reveled in the many stories told by family and friends about the "Golden Age" of the region, a four-decade period lasting from the 1930s through the 1960s.

It was the stuff of legends. Both a retreat for high-society as well as a popular family vacation spot, the Borscht Belt was a veritable proving ground for many of our country's most revered comedians from Jack Benny, Lenny Bruce and Milton Berle to Mel Brooks, Rodney Dangerfield and Woody Allen. It was also for years the preeminent entertainment destination for such musical acts as Bob Dylan, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Barry Manilow, Sammy Davis, Jr., Barbara Streisand and Simon & Garfunkel among many others.

Then in the blink of an eye everything changed. Starting in the mid-1970s and culminating in the 1980s a dramatic reduction in tourism resulted in the closure of hotel after hotel, shutting their doors forever. For years there was hope that these shut doors

~over~



### THE BORSCHT BELT

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would reopen once again, but such dreams were never to materialize. And as years passed into decades these shut doors could not put a stop to recurring vandalism, the return of nature nor the ultimate sacrifice of demolition.

They also could not stop Marisa Scheinfeld. Determined to visually document the resorts in their current state of entropy, she worked with friends, strangers, and local government officials to gain access to the ruins of the Borscht Belt. And when she entered what she found was a peculiar beauty.

"I truly feel there is a sense of a new life, a movement and presence in the photographs, and while bittersweet, and at times seemingly even apocalyptic, I think it's phenomenal," says Scheinfeld. "While photographing a lot of these [hotels], I'd walk in and feel disturbed by the way they looked and their conditions. But I'd also be absorbed and amazed. There was a tragedy and awe going on at the same time."

Scheinfeld's compelling photographs are compiled in her new book *The Borscht Belt*. Presenting over one hundred stunning images of dozens of hotel and bungalow sites, this new book takes the viewer deep into the heart of the lost world of the Borscht Belt. Seeing in dramatic and rich full color the ruins of what were once vibrant hubs of human activity evokes curious emotions and feelings, both light and dark.

"The ruin has long been a fascination for photographers—even from the earliest days of the medium's invention," says Scheinfeld. "I think that fascination lies largely within a range of the basic wow factor that a ruin can evoke, but also, deeper notions about tragedy, loss, absence, growth, what lie before us, what lay ahead – a contemplation of sorts – that often keeps us spinning, with no definitive answer."

Scheinfeld adds, "Ruins can be metaphors for things that survived, persisted and persevered despite the fact that everything around them as falling and crashing. Some people might consider them dead, but I see them as active and vital, a powerful force."

Marisa Scheinfeld will be presenting book talks across the country on *The Borscht Belt* this autumn and through 2017. For her complete calendar of events please go to <http://www.borschtbeltrevisited.com/events>

**Select Images from *The Borscht Belt* are Available for Viewing Online:**

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/2ye8lw21f27m7k0/AAB24Zul-dE8uE8FDakh8LyNa?dl=0>