

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MARISA SCHEINFELD

***What drew you to photograph these resorts—or rather, what is left of them?***

I began this project in graduate school – during a time when I was quite confused about my path as a photographer– and what kind of work I wanted to make. I received some poignant advice – and that was to shoot what I know. I knew my hometown region had a vibrant past, and that it had truly slipped away. Driving through the landscape of the former Borscht Belt today, its unavoidable to see a ruin, or remnant of what was once a grand vacation industry. I was aware that the Borscht Belt had been widely documented in memoirs, narrative histories, and archival photographic anthologies. I did not know of however, a visual record of the truth of its built and natural environment in the early 21st century. With this incentive, I began to make seasonal trips back to NY (I was at the time living in San Diego, CA) and started out by just driving. I drove to hotels and colonies I had never been to before, and others that I recalled visiting as a child. In conjunction with a bit of exploration, I did a lot of reading and research.

***As a photographer, how much of your work is about creating art, and how much is about documenting history?***

My answer to this – and to most things – is that it's neither one nor the other. It's both. I create because its what I feel drawn to do – however the innate nature of the photographer is to document - Since its invention in 1839 the photograph has been used to document people, places, events, and circumstances. From its beginnings of the medium has progressed, developed and revealed itself as a mechanism for understanding and increasing knowledge of the world. I consider myself an archeologist of sorts, searching for remnants and relics of an era, equipped with my tool (my camera – essentially an appendage), and my eyes.

~over~



### THE BORSCHT BELT

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***Having visited some but not all of these places as a child, what was familiar and what was foreign on your return visits?***

Many places were familiar, but the one that was the most (The Concord Hotel) has been completely demolished. Being on its former location was surreal and disorienting, in its mass of concrete and copper wiring. Others did trigger memories, like the card room at the Pines Hotel where I remember family members and friends visiting and walking through when it was still bustling. Other times, it was a total unknown adventure, discovering a ruin that I hadn't heard of or just going back to the same one, seeing something different, finding something different. And the seasons played an important role in the documentation of the landscape — both what I knew it as and what it is — by constantly changing and altering the ruin itself.

***What was it like getting access and photographing these places? What were your interactions with the locals like?***

Each site has its own story of when it closed, why, and the current conditions. As a result, access to each was always different.

Many people helped me access the sites and accompanied me, from the best of my friends to local lawyers, police and town commissioners who gave me a sort of silent permission to go up to the hotels once they realized what I was doing there — not destroying, stealing, etc. like many people whom they arrest at these places weekly, but a serious project of sorts.

The residents of the region are amazing — someone is always willing to share a story or recall a memory. In the beginning however, a lot of people would say, "You are crazy! There's nothing there! Why are you going in there? It's moldy, falling apart," etc. To me, this was the reason. I saw something there – a story – and one that I wanted to tell. And the project is a result of what I saw.

In the end, I could not have completed this project without the help of so many people – whether family, a friend, or a stranger, accompanying me on photographic shoots. The physical structures are unstable, dangerous, and volatile. It was essential to bring someone along for companionship, but also, for issues of safety.

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

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