

Lost Worlds

Two gorgeous art books revisit a pre-AIDS Fire Island.

August 6, 2013 By [Trent Straube](#)

✖ Throughout the 1960s and '70s—and arguably even today—two beach communities on a sliver of land called Fire Island, New York, offered a refuge from a world hostile to gays and lesbians. As such, the Pines and Cherry Grove became a Shangri-la on the sand, offering community, friendships, culture and sex. *Fire Island Modernist: Horace Gifford and the Architecture of Seduction*, with text by Christopher Bascom Rawlins, captures many of the 78 modernist homes—mostly cedar-and-glass beach houses—Gifford designed before 1981. (Openly gay, Gifford died of AIDS complications in 1992, at age 59.) As Rawlins explains: “His exuberant post-Stonewall, pre-AIDS masterpieces orchestrated bacchanals of liberation.”

To catch an intimate glimpse of some of the people who inhabited these spaces, check out Tom Bianchi: *Fire Island Pines*, a collection of the photographer’s Polaroids from 1975 to 1983. “I could not have imagined then that my Polaroids would so suddenly become a record of a lost world—my box of pictures a mausoleum, too painful to visit,” Bianchi writes. “When I reopened the box decades later, I found friends and lovers playing and smiling. Alive again.”

The Pines revival continued this summer, when filming began on HBO’s movie of Larry Kramer’s AIDS play *The Normal Heart*. One scene, shot on location, re-created a White Party circa 1981 on Fire Island. ✖
