



Travel back in time to the “Fabulous Fifties” in the Wildwoods, New Jersey – home to the country’s largest concentration of mid-century Doo Wop commercial architecture.

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The Wildwoods, NJ: The Doo Wop Capital of the World

The Wildwoods, NJ – Travel back in time to the “Fabulous Fifties” in the Wildwoods, New Jersey – home to the country’s largest concentration of mid-century commercial architecture.

Mid-century themed hotels/motels and businesses can be seen throughout the five-mile island. These hotels reflect their original predecessor buildings from the 1950s and ‘60s in architecture, décor, and color. They originally sprung up in the Wildwoods during the 1950’s and 1960’s when the mood of the nation was reflected in the architectural style called “googie,” “populux,” or “doo wop.”

Plastic palm trees tower over kidney shaped pools, juttied roof angles, and wrought iron balconies, and whimsical names and flamboyant themes give these similarly styled buildings individual character. Vivid imagery and vibrant aqua, oranges, and pinks bombard the eye of the motoring public, as bright neon signs beckon to travelers, each blatantly attempting to outdo their neighbor.

The motels and their ample parking reflect the burgeoning era of automotive travel of the 1950s. The designs and architectural features pay tribute to the post-war pop culture. Their architecture continues to memorialize the bold spirit of a newly restless society, while motel names conjure up tropical paradises and other exotic destinations.

A visit from Disney “imagineers” to the Wildwoods in the 1990’s for inspiration and ideas to complete their beach-and-boardwalk themed hotel, brought the realization to local Wildwoods business owners that their ‘unique surroundings’ were actually a significant slice of Americana and a key part of mid-century history. Out of this came the formation of the Doo Wop Preservation League in 1996. The League embarked on its mission to “foster awareness, appreciation, and education of the popular culture and imagery of the 1950s in an effort to promote preservation and unique renovations to the 220+ circa 1950s (doo wop) buildings in the Wildwoods.” Steve Izenour, world-renowned architect of Venturi, Scott Brown, and Associates, headed a study that revealed the Wildwoods to have the largest collection of flamboyant circa 1950s mid-century architecture in the nation, now labeled “Doo Wop”. As Art Deco is to South Beach, Doo Wop is to the Wildwoods, giving it its unique and distinct flair.

More than 90 of what once were hundreds of historically significant motels remain in the Wildwoods, while some newer business arrivals, such as the TD Bank, McDonalds and Wawa have incorporated the Doo Wop theme into their architecture. It is exciting to see that the privately owned, family-oriented motels are today being preserved and enhanced, and becoming more popular than ever. But it’s even more exciting to see new construction adopting the Doo Wop style in their design.

The preservation movement was given a big boost in 2006 when the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the motels of the Wildwoods among the "Eleven Most Endangered Historic Sites in America." The value and importance of preserving, and building upon, Wildwood's Doo Wop architecture and lifestyle was recognized by the National Trust as an important American asset to be enjoyed by future generations. In 2011, the Wildwoods' Caribbean Motel was named to the Historic Hotels of America registry – the only motel to ever receive that designation.

Now billing the Wildwoods as the "Doo Wop Capital of the World," the Doo Wop Preservation League continues to move forward on many fronts. The League has developed a design manual titled 'How to Doo Wop' that is given to developers of new construction to encourage them to incorporate Doo Wop design elements into their new properties.

The Wildwoods' Doo Wop Experience Museum and Neon Sign Garden – brimming with cool artifacts, fun memories, fascinating history, and bright neon lights – offers visitors a chance to learn more about the "Doo-Wop" era of American culture. Located at 450 Ocean Avenue in Wildwood, free to explore, and open seasonally from April to October – the museum is a celebration of architecture, design, music, pop culture and everything else that made the Wildwoods famous in its heyday of the 1950s and 1960s.

Outside at the entrance to the museum, a "neon garden" is taking shape that exhibits restored neon signs that were rescued from old Wildwood landmarks whose fate was a date with the wrecking ball. The entire complex glows with as much exuberance and optimism as the property's original Surfside Restaurant was intended to exude in its day...only this time, it's signaling in a whole new era of appreciation for Doo Wop in the Wildwoods!

The Doo Wop Experience Museum hosts a Doo Wop Bus Tour that runs two nights weekly throughout the summer. For a small fee, guests can hop on the bus and take a step back in time with a guided tour of the largest concentration of Doo Wop architecture in the country. Tour goers will learn about the shapes, images and symbols of the '50s architecture, along with the fractured geography and Space Age infatuation of the time during this award-winning tour.

Also reflective of the Fabulous Fifties era and carrying the legacy onto the Boardwalk are the Wildwoods Icon Wall Murals. The Greater Wildwoods Tourism Improvement and Development Authority (GWTIDA) conceived and developed the Icon Wall Mural projects to beautify selected public spaces and heighten appreciation of how the Wildwoods evolved over the decades into a living, breathing slice of Americana. The Icon Wall Murals feature key individuals or one-of-a-kind treasures that have significantly contributed to Wildwoods' colorful history and unique culture that has drawn people of all ages to this shore resort destination for generations. Bobby Rydell, Bill Haley and the Comets and Chubby Checker are the subjects of three iconic Icon Wall Murals that are located throughout the Wildwoods celebrating the Wildwoods' rich musical history and its claim as the "Birthplace of Rock 'n Roll Music."

The Doo Wop movement has gained a great deal of momentum and a national reputation while helping the Wildwoods expand its role as must-see vacation destination along the East Coast and, in particular, the southern Jersey shore. The Doo Wop Preservation League and the Wildwoods are preserving and enhancing the best of their past as they continue to build a year-round resort and recreation destination for the 21st century.

For additional information about the Wildwoods, visit www.WildwoodsNJ.com or call 800-992-9732.