

INTERNATIONAL

Vol. 19 | April 2011

BOWLING INDUSTRY

THE WORLD'S ONLY MAGAZINE DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO THE BUSINESS OF BOWLING

DALE SCHWARTZ'S PINSTRIPES

THREE B'S TO SUCCESS

DO CENTERS
HAVE SOULS?

PBA'S
RYAN SHAFER
KNOCKS DOWN
DIABETES

11 MONEY
MAKING
MENU SECRETS

POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 100
NEW YORK, NY



Photo by Michael John Grist

DO BOWLING CENTERS HAVE SOULS?

BY EVAN HENERSON

Everything about the setting was unusual in the grandest way: from the ravaged cars outside to the piles of discarded shoes to the stripped out floors littered with Pachinko balls, the pinball-slot machine hybrid like game that has been a staple of so many Japanese amusement halls.

"When I was there, the birds nesting in the ruins flew up and spiraled around me," recalls Michael John Grist of his visit to the Kanagawa Toyo Bowl in Tokyo. "I would have liked to have gotten that. You don't see birds flying around a bowling alley normally.

"I don't want to take photos of what a bowling alley might look like after hours," he adds. "I want to take pictures of ruins, stripped alleys, smashed bowling balls: all the things I've never seen before and things I feel most viewers have never seen."

Grist, who grew up in the north of England, settled in Japan to feed his interest in the exploration of ruins. Reading about the abandoned Kanagawa Toyo Bowl, a now rotting behemoth that once housed 108 lanes, Grist sat down in the quiet darkness to commune with what had once housed an arcade, a restaurant, gift shop and a day care area. Grist eventually took out his tripod and got to work.

"It's partly some kind of a spiritual feeling you get from a dead bowling alley. People used to come here. People had fun here. Families came here," says Grist. "Sitting there, I think there is something to be felt."

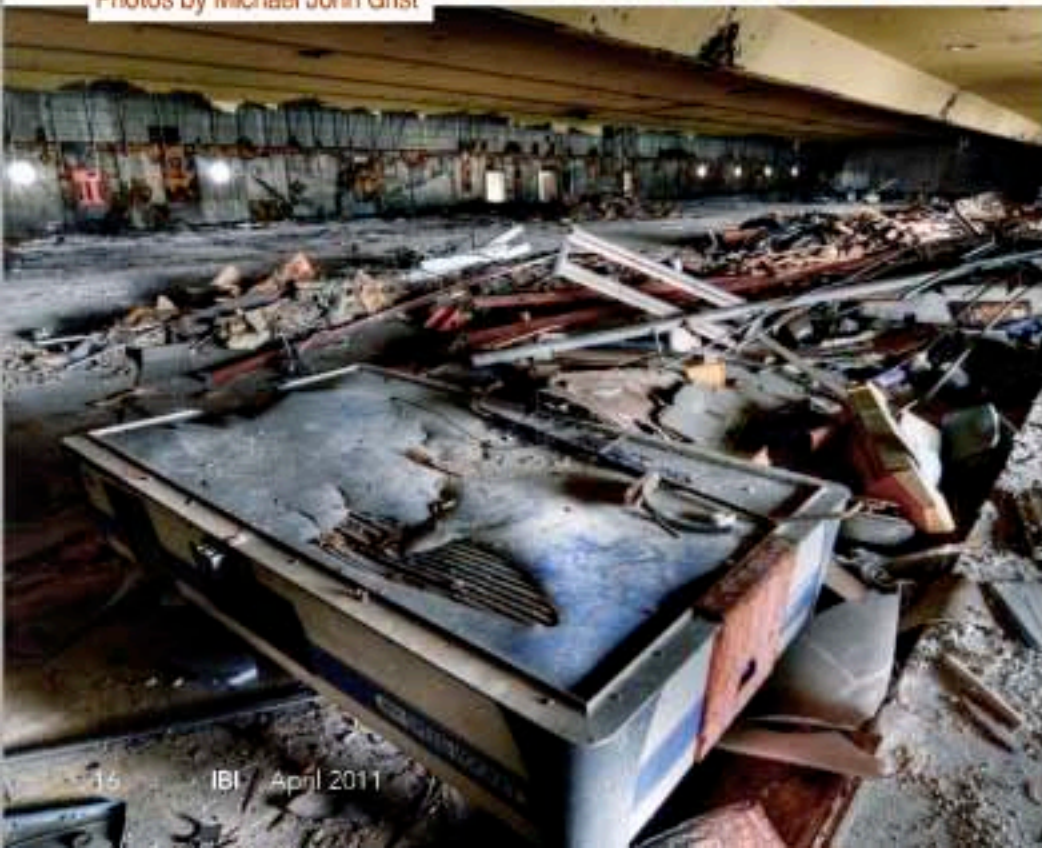
Bay Area photographer Amy Heiden didn't have quite as much opportunity as Grist to



Photo by Amy Heiden



Photos by Michael John Grist



commune with the spirit of the abandoned alley near a military base in Stockton, California. After Heiden had spent about 30 minutes --enough time to poke around and snap a couple of evocative shots -- a security guard came by and chased her out.

The facility was still in fair shape, reports Heiden who recalls imagining military personnel visiting the alley in uniform and relaxing there while off duty.

"It's always pretty visceral walking into a place like this," says Heiden. "We came in through the back door and right off we saw the innards of a pin machine. I find beauty in things that are decayed or have been abandoned."

Heiden, who takes a strong professional interest in abandoned buildings, learned about the alley -- which she declines to name -- both online and through word of mouth from fellow photographers who had been to the site.

"A lot of interesting things are left behind," she says of the long abandoned buildings she frequents. "Documents, photographs, machinery. As a society, we're so much about tearing things down and building something new. Places are going away quickly. That's another reason they intrigue me."

As ruins go, this one was still in relatively good shape: no graffiti, not a lot of clutter. Still the accumulating layer of dust on the chairs, floors and lanes speaks volumes. Heiden titled her shot -- fittingly -- "Gutter Ball," a procedure she is all too familiar with the couple of times each year when she bowls.

"I thought about what a horrible game I would probably have had if I played there," she says. "That's probably a bad thing to admit in a bowling magazine."

♦♦♦

Built into the side of a mountain, the former Bömische Brauhaus in Berlin is a one time brewery building that was converted into a sports center. When he visited the abandoned center, Keith Thorne, who describes his work as urban exploration, entered via some planks through an old skylight, dropping down onto an old basketball court.

"The place was built as a brewery and somehow they managed to squeeze a bowling alley between warehouses and board rooms," says Thorne. "The floors don't really match up. There's this strange staircase between floors and, and then you're walking into the bowling alley, and your jaw drops. The first thing you think is, 'holy cow, there's this site

Photo by Keith Thorne



right in the middle of Berlin."

"Your next thought is, 'OK, OK. Let's get the camera out, and the tripod up, and let's shoot this thing.'"

The 19th century building with its columns and classical arches gives Thorne's photos a colorful, almost pop art-ish look. The Bömische with its long corridor and brightly colored graffiti almost looks like a train station. Dennis Gerbeckx, another Berlin-based photographer who shot the same site, used black and white.

"It's a question of trying to capture what was there before, capture maybe the hypnotical grandeur of the place," says Thorne. "The structure, the arches the columns and how that interacts with the conversions."

"The atmosphere inside felt kind of magic," agrees Gerbeckx. "All the traces inside this derelict (site) tell stories, and you can imagine very easy how it must have been when it was 'alive.' Nothing had to be staged for a photo. It's like it is!" ♦



Evan Henderson is a features and lifestyle journalist who lives in Los Angeles. His work has appeared in TV Guide, American Theatre, Orange Coast and the Los Angeles Daily News where he was a staff writer and critic for nine years.

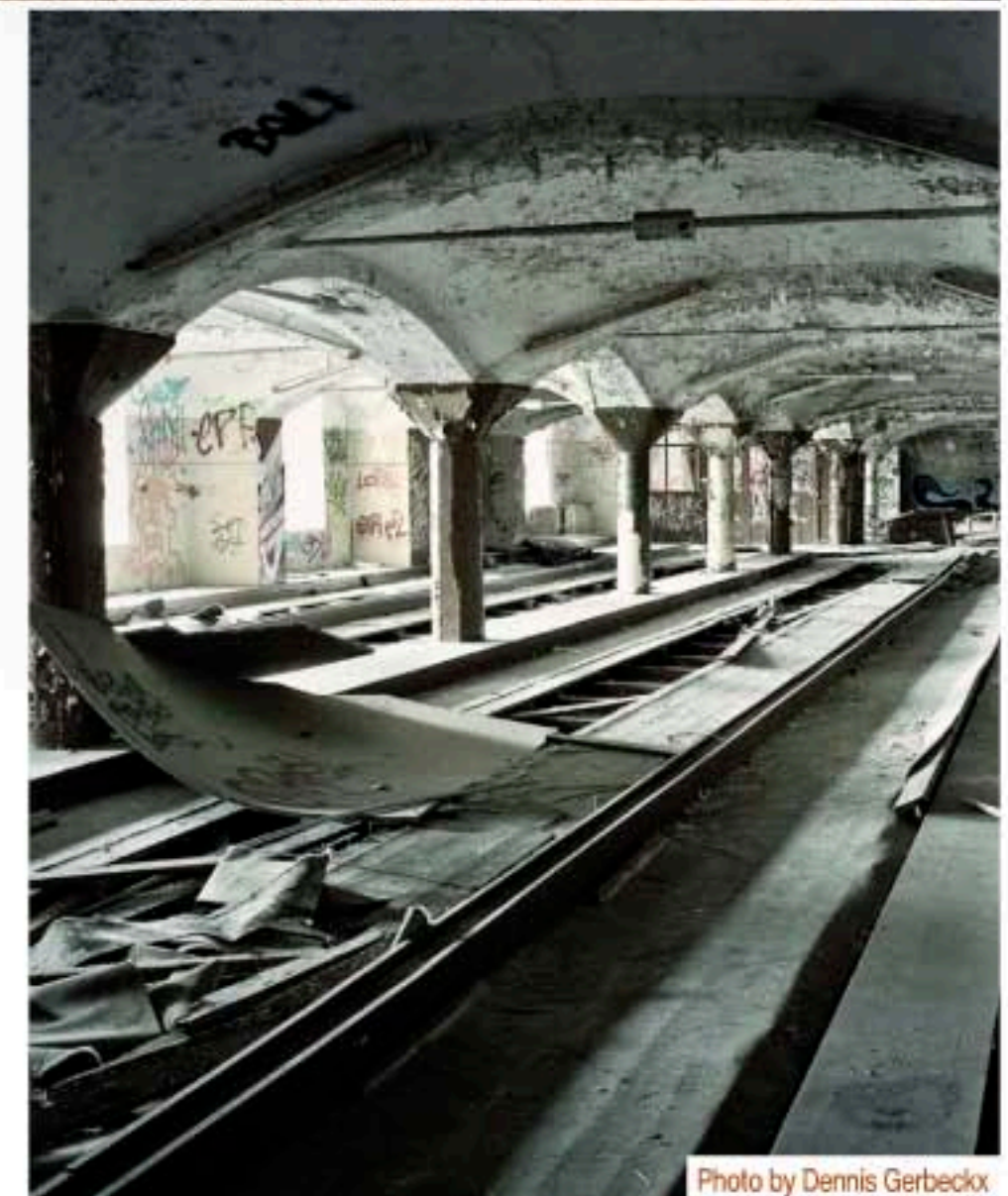


Photo by Dennis Gerbeckx