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Throwback Thursday: Photos capture original cool of '70s Dogtown skateboarders

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By Hannah Madans/Staff Writer

In 1975, photographer Hugh Holland started taking photos of skateboarders in Southern California, capturing the style and energy of local skaters during that era.

A group known as the Zephyr Competition Team, or Z-Boys, surfed in an area known as Dogtown in the Pacific Ocean Park and Venice area. After surfing, or on days when the waves were flat, the 12-member team would skateboard.

In 1975, the Del Mar Nationals – a skateboarding competition that hosted an estimated 500 competitors – were held in California.

At the national event, skateboarders around the country saw the Z-Boys riding aggressively and low on their boards, as if they were riding a wave.

In the same year, Skateboarder magazine was relaunched and featured a series called “Dogtown articles” about the team’s unique style.

“I was 30 years old and getting into photography, so when I saw this skating phenomenon happening in Southern California, I just had to photograph it,” Holland said.

In the mid 1970s, California had a major drought, and many residents emptied their pools, Holland said. Skateboarders and the Z-Boys took advantage of this and used pools to practice tricks.

Z-Boy Tony Alva, in a pool nicknamed “the Dogbowl,” is credited with doing the first aerial, forever changing extreme sports in 1977.

As skateboarding became more popular, so did skate parks. Around 200 were built by 1982; one of the first was in Carlsbad.

The Z-Boys and other skate teams were eventually torn apart as skaters were offered money to compete elsewhere.

“That’s one of the reasons I stopped taking photos,” Holland said. “It started to become too commercial with things like skate parks and insurance, and all the good riders went to skate for companies and were wearing all their gear with logos everywhere. I liked it when it was about free spirits.”

Stacy Peralta was one Z-Boy who found success beyond the 1970s. He continued to skateboard and later co-wrote and directed the documentary “Dogtown and Z-Boys,” and wrote the film “Lords of Dogtown.” Both depicted skateboarding in Dogtown in the 1970s.

Holland is represented by M+B, an art gallery in Los Angeles. All photos are reprinted with M+B’s permission. They can be found in the book “Locals Only: California Skateboarding 1975-1978” (AMMO Books, 2010).



On the Rocks at Arthur's Pool, Santa Monica
chromogenic print

The drought in California forced many to drain their pools. Skateboarders used these pools to practice new tricks. It's a miracle I never got hit with a board, Holland said. I was lying on my back at the bottom of a swimming pool with all the skateboards above me.