

VLACHOS' VIEWS

America through the lens of PAUL VLACHOS



“Chris Flats” is in Brooklyn, New York. Urban flat fix joints tend to be storefront operations, but they inevitably spill over into the sidewalk and street. They also tend to be open late. Chris keeps a traffic cone handy in order to reserve that crucial space in front, which is part of the work area, even though it’s a public street.

Not too far east of El Paso. This trailer is right off the interstate. I don’t recall seeing the actual place, but it may have been at the next exit. I like the wording on this one: “We Fix Flats.” I also like how big the trailer is compared to the sign.



These doors close on a large shed in an abandoned truck stop in Texas. It keeps getting more lonely-looking each time I pass through. It’s an empty and lopsided kind of place, with an abandoned steakhouse restaurant sharing the same lot. I always stop here, even if it’s just to grab something from the cooler.



Shiprock Arizona. I don’t take many photos on the rez, but Obees Pit Stop was too good to pass up. All of your tire needs are met at Obees.

From Texas to Mexico. Mexico Tire Shop, that is. This is near the Gowanus Canal, also in Brooklyn. Did I mention Brooklyn in the opening paragraph? I probably should have, as the rivalries between the Bronx and Brooklyn are as fierce and distinct as those between east and west Texas. There are lots of tire places in Brooklyn and Queens but, out of fairness, the number of flat fix places in the Bronx outdoes them.



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Utah, on the edge of Bonneville Salt Flats. There's a tire place out back of the diner/mini mart here, which is the main establishment on this exit for the salt flats. The tire place is never open when I pass by, but it looks to be a going concern, so either they or I keep odd hours. One day, I'll see a sign of life here. I don't know why I'm always drawn to this exit, not far from Wendover, but I cannot ever pass by without stopping here.

Another shot from Brooklyn. Okay, call me a liar - I'll get to the Bronx soon enough. This place may or may not still fix flats. At some point, they flipped the sheet metal on one side of the gate and all hell broke loose. Who knows what goes on here any more? It's on a block of wrecking yards and the street, itself, is dirt and gravel. I was amazed I came out of that single block with my tires intact. Then again, I may think too much about tires.



h, the Bronx! One thing about the Bronx, one of many things, is that you can often find hand-painted logos for national brands displayed prominently.

Austin, Nevada. Now, here's a place I could tell some stories about, but I'll try to keep it brief and save the details for another day. In short, the old gentleman who lives and works here, just at the bottom of the treacherous Austin Summit, is a volunteer fireman in his spare time. As such, he has seen his share of wrecks, which is why he used to post a "Speed Trap Ahead" sign at the driveway of his establishment. He mainly wanted people to slow down as they rolled through Austin. The subject of Austin is for another day. This is one place I actually got a flat fixed once, after a glorious day of soaking in the back country at a secret hot spring.



Texas again. What I like about this is the pure visual message. Nowhere do you see the words "tire" or "flat fix" displayed on this sign, for Rael's Diesel. Just a simple pictograph. It could mean "donut," but my money is on "tire."

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