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Paterek Brothers: A New Jersey institution

Pablo Deferrari

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Maxwell's in Hoboken, The Dirt Club in Bloomfield, City Gardens in Trenton, The Showplace in Dover and The Stone Pony in Asbury Park.

They reeked of cheap perfume, their walls sweat whiskey, and the floors were littered with punched-out cigarettes, but they were institutions — New Jersey's rock and roll institutions. You may have never heard of such names, but some of the world's most legendary bands were shot into the stars from these dive joints.

Aside from incubating punk rock in the late '70s, the roots of a different kind of New Jersey institution began slithering into the Garden State's soil aiming for bedrock: the Paterek Brothers. While they too strummed chords — these guys could've fought Stiv Bators or Johnny Thunders for the stage — instead they chose to wrestle with Stuttgart metal and hides.

The brothers are a rare breed of men who've an artistic gene rubbing alongside an engineering one they've picked up from their Pops, a chief tool and die maker for GM. When these two genes work together, their flesh and blood carriers become immortal legends.

"I wanted this white Fender guitar that cost around 200 bucks," John Paterek laughs, "and I had to get it before New Jersey state tax went into effect ... anyway, I couldn't buy the thing painting RCA trucks for a dollar an



The Paterek Brothers, Ray (left) and John (right), along with John's son, Andrew (center).

hour — I needed to make more money."

"Yeah, and he wanted to work for Lehman's!" his son Andrew hollers from across the shop. "Take the train into the city ... they told 'em to cut his hair, shave his mustache, and come in for an interview!"

They apprenticed with master upholsterers and metal fabricators in the 1960s and spent nearly a decade plying their artistry transforming Auburns, Duesenbergs and Packards into concours thoroughbreds. By the early '70s, the Porsche stain bled into John's skin producing an itch that turned into an Irish Green '66 912. After transforming that one into an example that would've made the factory look like rank amateurs, they set up shop in an industrial pocket of Chatham, New Jersey, in 1977.

For the next 39 years, the Paterek Brothers would become a mecca for historically significant Porsches that included 356s, Abarth Carreras, a 959, a 904, a 911 Ruf Yellow Bird, dozens of 911s and 912s, 914s, 924s, and 944s looking to be reincarnated. Geriatric Ferraris, Royces, Morgans, Mercs (including a Gullwing), Jags, Fords, Auburns, Tatras, Harleys, Vespas, Corvettes and VWs began taking notice of the brothers' rejuvenatory prowess and pleaded to have their youth back.



A 1965 Porsche 911; a few details away from being perfect.

Standing outside of the their garage with a 993 bumper cover under one arm and 968 headlamp covers and trims in a skid row paper bag under the other, I should've had my throat gripped by intimidation. Considering the pedigree that rolled in and out of their doors spanning my entire lifetime, the thought of asking for their help with

some paint seemed stupid — nervy, even.

A one-door garage with a professionally homemade placard on an adjacent chain-link fence that read "Paterek Brothers, Inc" gave me good vibes. No glam, contrived sophistication or dated-modern touches to suggest looking the fool with this simple request rendered in primer; walking in completely disarmed me.

An office never meant to entertain more than one person led into the garage where a guy about my age was lying down on surfboard rolling factory undercoating on a red 356C's belly; it was Andrew Paterek, John's son.

"Man, it pains me to roll undercoat over these dents on the belly pan ... but the owner's got a tight budget on this one," he groans

The first five minutes of chat went like two old back-slapping friends separated by time; Porsche history, the 356 above him, and a preface of how he went from being a School of Visual Arts grad majoring in photography to a restorer consumed the next 15.

"My uncle Ray is in the other building around the corner ... just go right in," Andrew said.

It was Ray, the upholsterer and fabricator, who knew about the particulars under my arms. The few steps from one building to the next felt like two or three memory film clips of a walk between the Werk I and Werk II buildings in Zuffenhausen that was never part of my history.

Ray was something else. He had a genuineness in his handshake, smile and hospitality that made me want to spend the weekend chatting away with him in that shop.

Over his shoulder was what the history books never show: a 911T, a Vespa and a yellow wire-wheeled '58 Jag XK150 all in various stages of undress. Primered metal, rust, virgin steel grafted onto old, white/black Pascha fabric and black leather caught mid-consummation, vintage Porsche posters hanging with the walls, while the odd 356 door and '57 Bugeye Sprite hood eavesdropped from below.

My soul sang in eight octave ranges right then nailing an impossible G10 at the sight of what was arguably the oldest 911 in the state, a '65 clothed in a psychedelic Braun dress on the lift next door hovering over a partially decomposed 356 Drauz Roadster.

Stop.



The future star of Pebble Beach, the 356A convertible D (Drauz) awaiting a full restoration.

You've never seen nearly every remnant of Porsche's golden age under one roof ... unadulterated. Porsche archaeologists, myself included, will walk away from this joint feeling content with life and ready for departure into the next gig because we'd have seen it all.

In walks John, and now the amp's cranked to 10. Following the family's trait of natural pleasantness, he's beautifully mellow and warm with a natural ability to hook you in with Porsche-peppered anecdotes in junkie proportions.

The under-armed primered 993 and 968 parts have been dumped and forgotten somewhere in the shop; Porsche conversation-induced dementia becomes a temporary problem.

John, the paint and body guy, talks of his ex '52 Porsche America Roadster that Wolfgang Porsche now owns, guitars, music, the original ski rack, skis, and Kardex on that '65 911, conversations with Wolfgang and Peter Porsche, and his wife Donna's '62 Super 90 356 Cabriolet.

Ray comes in with a few jabs about colorful off-topic philosophies on the joys of luddism, his '33 Chevy Master sedan, his respect and adherence on some of the factory's imperfections in a restoration, and how he's got to reconstruct the rotted flesh on that 356 Drauz Roadster that's a full restoration at the request of the owner.



A 356 door is sacrificed for use as a study guide.

The focus turns to Andrew because he's taking the family legend into the future, and his thoughts have me curious.

"When I graduated SVA, the photography studios were closing down, so I had a choice to make and decided to work with my hands," he tells me. "Besides, I've been doing this (nodding at the 911T) practically all of my life."

"How old were you when you started messing around with these cars?" I ask.

"15," John, his Pops interrupts. "We gave 'em a sanding block and told 'em to start sanding; 10 minutes into it, he throws the sanding block against the wall and says, 'To hell with this!'" We all bellow a good laugh.

Will younger generations continue cherishing these early Porsches their fathers and grandfathers sank a fortune in pulling from the depths of oblivion? Will newer Porsches rendered in more plastics, wires and chips require equivalent preservation efforts 30-40 years from now? Will his talents as a master craftsman/artist for these fossils be of any value to future generations? Sobering but optimistic thoughts volley between us.

John, Ray and Andrew run on full passion; this isn't a job, it's art. Little to no advertising, no airs despite the priceless artifacts surrounding them, and not a trace of Bondo smell; the three of them run the show in this word-of-mouth atelier.

Don't look for a chic lounge to park it in while waiting for an espresso before talking about restoration plans for

the heap on your trailer; this isn't that kind of place. This is a *Porschista's* Stone Pony, a New Jersey institution where the stage is imperfect but experience is raw and undeletable from the memory.

If you're a petrolhead with a thirst for history, breaking into sweats and palpitations at the sight of naked lead edged 356 doors and 44-year-old leather, you'll not want to leave.

If you pay them a visit, leave the electro-gadgets behind; they'll ruin the time travel experience to the analog. Beyond the concrete threshold leading into the shop is 1977 with a bit of 1958 and 1964 in suspended animation.

You'll not miss 2016 one bit.

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About the Author



A dyed-in-the wool, air-cooled 911 junkie, Pablo Deferrari doesn't discriminate against other Porsches. Want further proof? He's in love with Porsche's early water-cooled models and is dedicated to the celebration of the 924, 928, 944 and 968 series. Pablo is one car away from having all four of these models in his own collection: the 924.

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An advertisement for the ESCORT PASSPORT MAX radar detector. The ad features a black radar detector with a digital display showing '55' and '49 Highway'. To the right, a hand holds a smartphone displaying the ESCORT app interface. The text 'NEW PASSPORT MAX High Definition Radar Performance' is on the left, and 'Take Ticket Protection to the Max' is in large bold letters in the center. A red 'GET IT NOW' button is on the right, with 'Includes FREE Ground Shipping' below it. The ESCORT logo is in the bottom left corner.

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