

Ira Wagner
Twinhouses of The Great Northeast
Artist Statement and Biography

The Twinhouses of The Great Northeast neighborhood of Philadelphia reflect how people share a common border. Some families choose to mark their space with a fence or shrubbery. Others differentiate themselves with varying architectural elements and subtle changes to trim, windows and paint colors. One family chooses to hide completely behind a tall hedge; another lives in front of the house with common backyard elements – chairs, grills, patio tables, open for all to see. Common upkeep, such as mowing the lawn, ends at a rough approximation of the property line rather than being shared. One side of a structure shows pride of ownership, the other is missing a shutter on a window. When borders are such an important issue in the world, these images reflect a human inclination to mark and delineate one's space rather than share it.

These structures show what was built in response to the search for the American dream, even within the city limits. These modest homes are variations on a theme of two side-by-side houses that share a common wall. To create some variety, architectural elements appear pasted on the front of the box – various materials, gables, dormers, rooflines and trim. Because of the shared occupancy within a single structure, little has changed in these houses since they were built. As a result, this area of Philadelphia shows much of the original intent of the architects, developers and residents. Yet, over time, small differences have emerged that reflect how people live together as neighbors, differentiate their own property, customize their slice of suburban living and make their property their own.

Ira Wagner began studying photography in 2008, after working on Wall Street for more than 25 years. With an interest in urban history and design, he has focused on photographing the urban landscape. He received his MFA from the Hartford Art School in 2013 and taught photography at Monmouth University in New Jersey from 2013 to 2021. He is currently the Executive Director of the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, NJ. For his MFA project, *Superior Apartments*, he spent two years photographing the landscape of the Bronx. In addition to *Twinhouses of the Great Northeast*, since graduating he has completed his project titled *Houseraising*, photographing houses being raised on the Jersey Shore following Hurricane Sandy. This project was featured in *The New Republic*, *The National Geographic*, and was released in a photobook by Daylight Books in 2018. Based on images from *Twinhouses*, he was selected a Critical Mass Top 50 photographer by Photolucida and participated in Review Santa Fe. *Twinhouses* was also highlighted in a number of photography blogs including *The Washington Post* and *Lenscratch*. He is currently working on photographing the landscape along the Northeast Corridor train route between New York and Washington.