

# The New York Times Book Review, December 8, 2019

## "Photo Book Review: Sunshine Hotel," by Luc Sante

By categories: **Photography** ▾



"West Side Highway, New York 1977," from "Sunshine Hotel." Mitch Epstein

[Mitch Epstein](#) is a [documentary photographer](#) with a strong grasp of narrative, who has undertaken ambitious reportorial projects, often published as books. These include "Family Business" (2003), which chronicles the liquidation of his father's furniture store and tenement holdings with novelistic amplitude; "American Power" (2009), a sweeping survey of the forms of energy production and the ways in which they affect individual lives; and "New York Arbor" (2013), a stunning portrait gallery of the city's outstanding and venerable trees. Now, in **SUNSHINE HOTEL** (Steidl/PPP/D.A.P., 263 pp., \$75), he has cut and shuffled the decks, selecting images from all across his career and back to his teenage years, sequencing them not chronologically, narratively or typologically but intuitively, each image somehow suggesting the next. This strategy, cinematic rather than textual, redirects attention to Epstein's formal strengths. I was annoyed at having to constantly turn to the back of the very substantial volume to get dates and locations, before I realized that that was the point — to present the pictures without distraction from anything lying outside the frame. There are so many ravishing, heartbreaking photographs here, not all previously published in books, that the collection seems to generate a kind of speed as you page through, gliding along its succession of formal rhymes and clashing geographies. Mingling together photos from Epstein's many series makes certain distinctive ones recur like drumbeats, such as the powerfully clear pictures taken at the [Pine Ridge Indian Reservation](#) in South Dakota in 2018. What emerges is that Epstein's deepest feelings are for the compromised landscape, and that he takes beautiful photographs that cannot help telling urgent stories about that compromise.

Luc Sante's most recent book is "The Other Paris." He teaches at Bard.