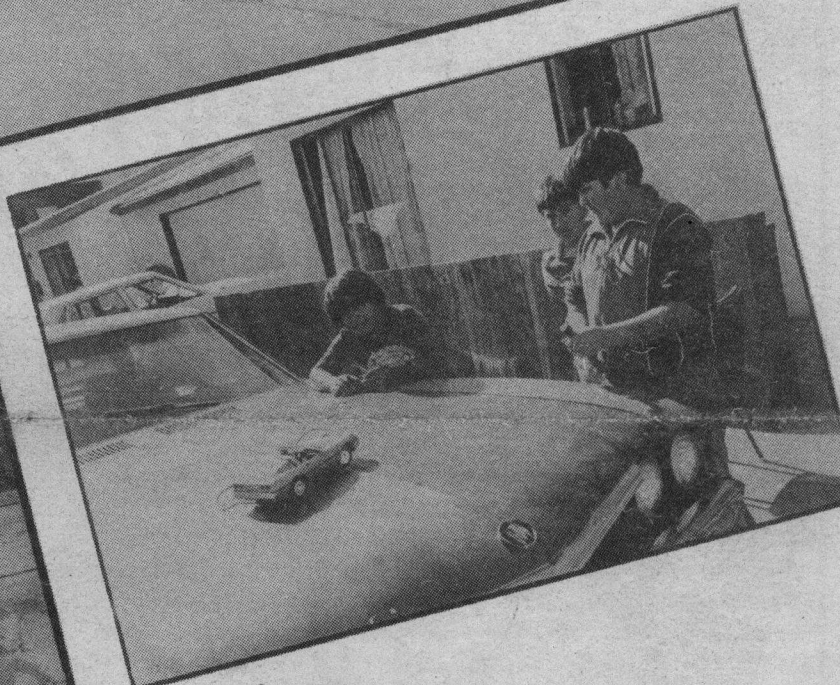
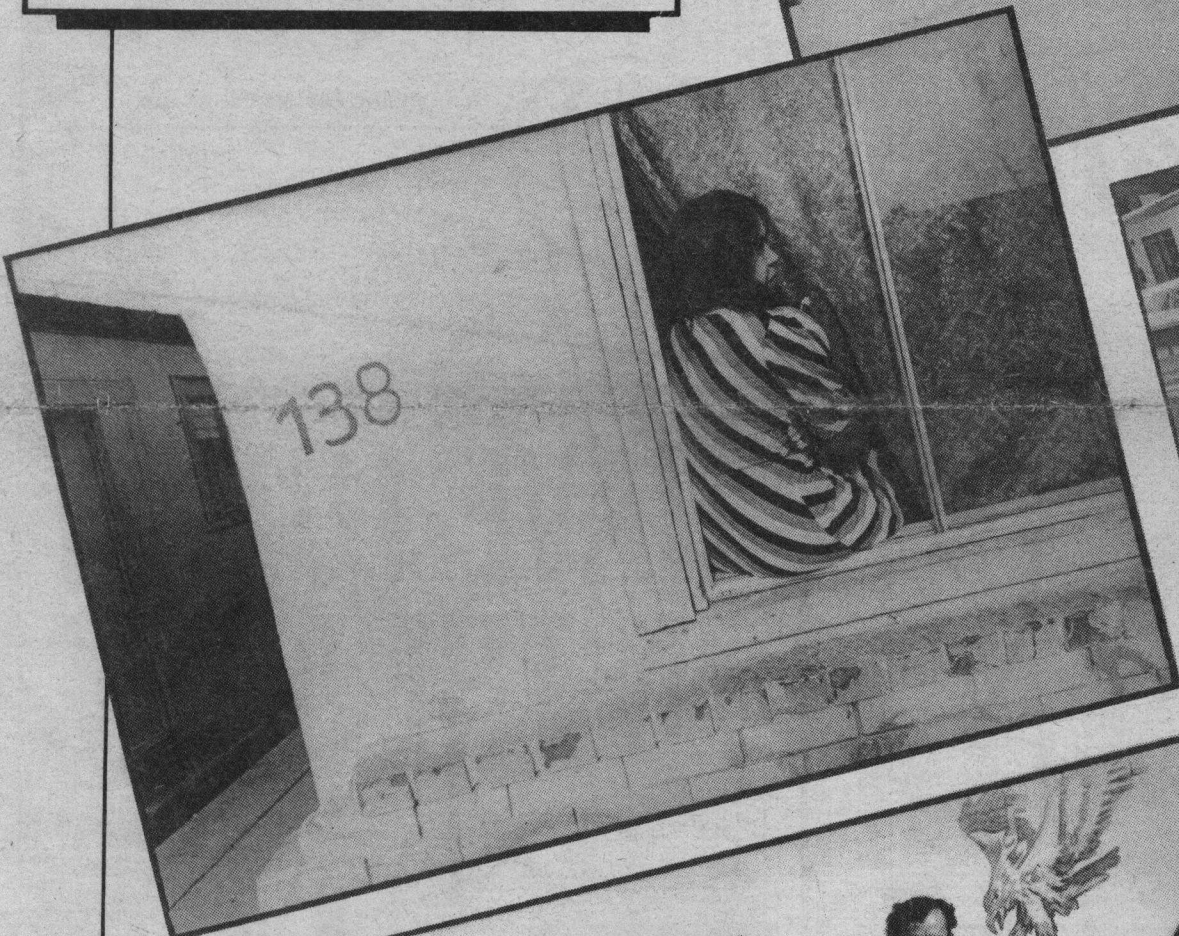


Beach Flats

THE MANY FACES of BEACH FLATS

By Victor Varela



Counterclockwise from top

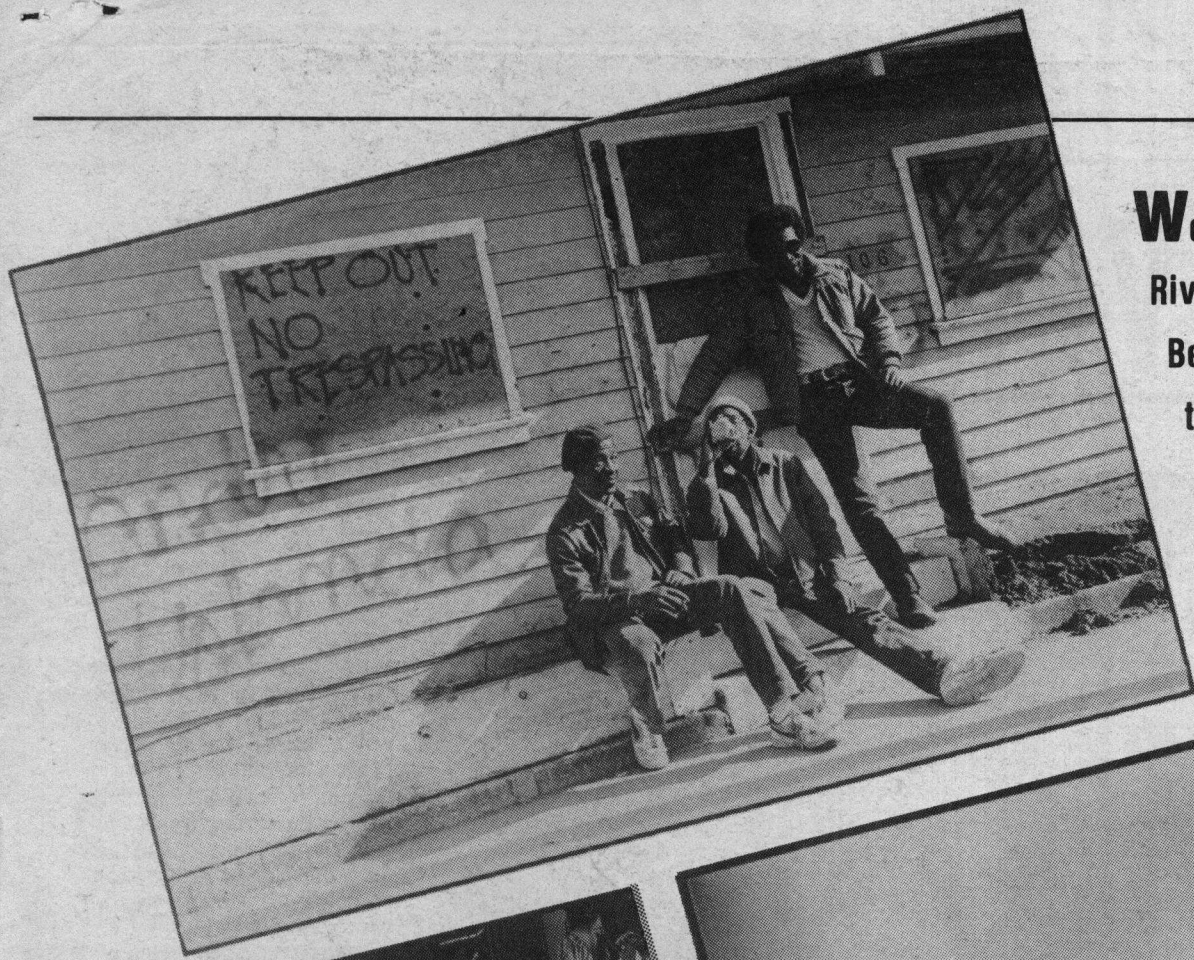
This is a neighborhood where living and playing in the street is the most natural thing in the world.

The windows here are also used for sitting, and for visiting with the passersby.

With its 75-percent Latino population, Beach Flats and Mexico are nearly one and the same. These guys are adventurers like the original Spanish *conquistadores*.

The garden or yard as a space for personal and family leisure scarcely exists in Beach Flats. These boys hang out on the street. Everybody is packed in together.





Wedged between the mouth of the San Lorenzo River and the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, Beach Flats is one of the city's most distinctive neighborhoods. Glimpses into its daily life are caught in the words and pictures of photographer Victor Varela.



Counterclockwise from top

The other 25 percent of the Beach Flats population also has its areas. Although these men may look a little skeptical about having their picture taken, sipping a beer and visiting with them was very easy to do.

A certain crowded informality is also present in the surfer community. Everything in Beach Flats is different from the rest of Santa Cruz.

At first we had problems of mutual mistrust, but finally we relaxed enough to take this picture. The punk community is the most marginal in Beach Flats. They don't want to know anything about the Mexicans or anybody else. They have their own world with their own emblems and tatoos.

Life is hard in this neighborhood, and this woman works long hours every day. There's a story to be told between the toy rifle hanging on the wall and the *senora* looking straight into the camera.

