

HELP ?

New York's 10 worst landlords: Steve Croman

The Village Voice; New York; Mar 24, 1998; J A Lobbia; Jennifer Gonnerman;

Volume: 43
Issue: 12
Start Page: 49-50
ISSN: 00426180
Subject Terms: Lessors
Apartment houses
Landlord tenant relations
Rents

Geographic Names: New York City New York

Personal Names: Croman, Steve

Abstract:

Steve **Croman**, an aggressive young landlord who has bought buildings on Mott and Mulberry Streets, is one of New York City's worst. He is trying to drive the tenants from their buildings to make way for residents who can pay higher rents.

Full Text:

Copyright Village Voice Mar 24, 1998

One of the first things Steve Croman did after purchasing a row of buildings on Mott Street last year was to crash the tenants' association meeting. The wiry, unshaven landlord showed up with a wide smile and plenty of promises. He even brought his wife, Harriet, and his dog, a Jack Russell terrier named Eddie. Schmoozing with his new tenants, Croman assured them he had no drastic plans for their building.

It wasn't long before the tenants realized that this was a lie. What Croman really wanted was for all of them to move out. Croman may be only 31 years old, but he has already earned a reputation among his tenants as an aggressive landlord. Over the last two years, he snatched up buildings on Mott and Mulberry Streets. Croman then launched a full-scale campaign to drive tenants from their rent-regulated homes.

Boutiques, art galleries, and pricey restaurants have popped up recently in and among the 100-year-old tenements lining Little Italy and the northern parts of Chinatown-neighborhoods that are beginning to earn the trendy moniker NoLiTa. But where Croman is concerned, this tale of gentrification has a dark side.

After Croman renovates his empty apartments, the rents skyrocket. Along the way, this brash young landlord is helping to redefine the face of these neighborhoods: pushing out struggling artists and immigrants to make way for investment bankers and corporate lawyers. And Croman is proving that a landlord need not turn his building into a crack den or physically assault his tenants in order to turn their lives upside down. Croman declined to comment, saying he was too busy to be interviewed for this story.

One of the landlord's targets is Jelon Vieira, the artistic director of DanceBrazil, a respected Afro-Brazilian dance company. Vieira, 45, pays \$700 a month for a two-bedroom apartment at 252 Mott Street, where he lives with his 16-year-old son. Vieira says Croman tried to get him to leave by offering him \$5000, then \$15,000. When Vieira refused, Croman cranked up the pressure.

According to Vieira, his landlord has called him more than 30 times over the last few months to pester him about moving. Croman has even showed up at the choreographer's office to try to persuade him in person. Vieira is often away on tour and sometimes has friends house-sit. Now Croman is using this against him, trying to evict Vieira by claiming he sublet the apartment.

Croman's smarmy, duplicitous style can be even more unnerving than his persistence. "He calls you like you're his best friend," says Vieira. "[He asks,] 'How are you? How's your health?' " When The New

