

VARIETY

## Film Review: ‘Gut Renovation’



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### [Ronnie Scheib](#)

**The latest in a line of documentaries decrying the destruction of viable working-class businesses and residential neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Su Friedrich’s film bypasses sadness and indignation for flat-out anger and well-aimed sarcasm. The speed with which rezoning and tax breaks have transformed whole sections of the city into barren, all-but-gated enclaves for the rich, forcing out small enterprises, local shops, artists’ lofts and affordable housing, suggests that nobody can fight City Hall — or in this case, Mayor Bloomberg’s pro-developer juggernaut. Pic debuted at Gotham’s Film Forum.**

Friedrich and friends called Brooklyn’s Williamsburg neighborhood home since renovating a deserted cast-ironworks whose fanciful creations graced numerous Gotham landmarks. Like many New York loft-dwellers, they had lived in tacitly agreed-upon commercial spaces with the owners’ and the city’s full knowledge — only to be kicked out once the space was made habitable and the area rezoned.

As in several recent Brooklyn-under-fire films, the pic interviews small-business owners, some given only one month to vacate establishments that had been running for more than a quarter century. But unlike those other docus, Friedrich uses all manner of wry digs and ironic whimsy to make her point. Thus an alphabetically arranged montage of businesses that have either barely survived or fallen victim to gentrification is accompanied by the jaunty tune “Kommt Zusammen,” a catchy Yiddish ditty about bringing people together. As developers instantly descend upon the ’hood following rezoning, Friedrich keeps a tally of buildings demolished or

remodeled beyond recognition in a small area she calls Condoburg, synched to the sound of jackhammers.

Rather than invoking sympathy or shared outrage, the filmmaker creates a kind of complicity with her audience, particularly as she explores the depressingly similar, sterile apartments of the high-rises steadily surrounding her. Some of her strongest arguments are made by the developers themselves, in the form of ads whose unsubtle snob appeal and self-caricaturing superficiality speak volumes: Love to Live Above It All, Hardcore Luxury or The Hippest Dress Codes and the Coolest Zip Codes. Friedrich sneeringly records pretentious condo names, fancy dogs and fancier strollers. But she also proves capable of becoming fascinated by a huge boulder that defies attempts to remove it. ("I love that rock!" the filmmaker notes.)

Friedrich's stridently sardonic voice and the "damn-the-torpedoes" directness of her spoken and superimposed commentary gives the film its unique bite and personality. She makes no attempt to soft-peddle her opinions (writing "F\*\*\* you!" on a probing letter from a realtor and sending it back), and no pretense of impartiality. Collaborator Cathy Quinlan, credited as the pic's writing consultant, even suggests she change the name of the film to "I Hate Rich People."

### **Gut Renovation**

*(Documentary) Reviewed on DVD, New York, March 5, 2013. Running time: 81 MIN.*

An Outcast Films release. Produced, directed, edited by Su Friedrich. Camera (color, HD), Friedrich; sound, Bill Seery.

With: Munesh Bissessar, Cathy Quinlan, Peter Kuper, Mimi Hassimi, Francisco Oyla, Romin Sirjue.

<http://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/film-review-gut-renovation-1200004824/>