

San Francisco most evil landlord who forces tenants to live in squalor and sues them if they try to escape

By [WILL POTTER](#)

A Chinese-born real estate mogul has been branded one of America's most 'evil' landlords over claims she rents out squalid properties then bullies tenants who complain.

Sophie Lau, 82, owns 10 buildings and 70 units across San Francisco, and has amassed a net worth upwards of \$6 million through a real estate portfolio with her husband and son.

While the 4ft tall property tycoon insists that her tenants have caused her problems for years, an investigation from the [San Francisco Standard](#) claimed that residents in her homes are the ones that have suffered.

She made headlines in 2016 after hiking tenant Neil Hutchinson's rent from \$1,800 to \$8,000 overnight, ultimately leading to his eviction.

In a text to the outlet, former San Francisco Supervisor Aaron Peskin, who fought for Hutchinson before his eviction, described Lau as 'the definition of an evil landlord.'

This sentiment was echoed by a number of former tenants, who say Lau's company refused to fix leaky roofs, reduce black mold and even turn on the heat during the winter.

Former tenant Jenna Giusto, 28, said she moved into one of Lau's apartments in January 2023, and soon after she found herself catching water dripping from her roof in saucepans.

She said after years of battling for even minor fixes, in her mind Lau and her company are 'evil, but genius in a way... I don't understand how they can live their lives like this as such evil people. Truly. Deeply. Evil.'



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Sophie Lau, 82, who owns 10 buildings and 70 unites across San Francisco, has been branded an 'evil' landlord as she commands a small empire of apartments across the city



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Former tenant Jenna Giusto said she lasted three months in one of Lau's apartments before leaving due to water leaks and a lack of heat, and said of Lau: 'I don't understand how they can live their lives like this as such evil people. Truly. Deeply. Evil'



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I died and was sent back from heaven to deliver an urgent message



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Guisto said her apartment in San Francisco's Inner Richmond neighborhood was plagued by leaks in her living and dining room, black mold across the west-facing wall, and a lack of heat even into the winter.

She said she shivered at night while also being struck down by longCovid, while the issues also caused her roommate to develop a crippling cough.

When asked why tenants in a number of her buildings complain of a lack of heat, Lau told the San Francisco Standard that she keeps the heat low because tenants often complain about it being too hot.

The outlet said that during its investigation no evidence of tenants ever complaining about the heat being too high was found, and Lau couldn't produce any when prompted.

'Everybody has a different body temperature,' Lau said, adding that 'if it's below the standard, don't you think we would get a citation?'

The investigation found the Laus have been hit with a number of violations over a lack of heat.

Giusto shared footage of Lau visiting her apartment to inspect the leaks, and despite evidence of water damage and drips seen down the walls, Lau insisted there was no leak.

She said she lived in the apartment just three months, and said a neighbor helped fix most of the issues without the aid of her landlords.



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A number of complaints have been focused on one of the Lau's properties on Clement Street in the Inner Richmond area (pictured), which is allegedly plagued by leaky roofs, no heat and black mold



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The Lau's previously made headlines in 2016 after hiking tenant Neil Hutchinson's rent from \$1,800 to \$8,000 overnight, ultimately leading to his eviction

The neighbor, who declined to be named, said the Lau's employ fear tactics to fight tenant complaints, including filing counter-lawsuits or imposing costly lease-breaking fees.

'If you make a direct frontal attack and go to the Rent Board, they become more resistant, resentful, and reluctant to do anything,' the tenant said.

'I've been fighting this battle for a while, and I've learned how to get things done with the Laus.'

Giusto said she believed her neighbor helping fix her apartment was on purpose from Lau, and said it is 'evil, but it's genius in a way.'

'The fact that they're getting around all this is crazy to me. I don't understand how they can live their lives like this as such evil people. Truly. Deeply. Evil,' she said.

Giusto said when she left, the Laus held onto her \$4,000 security deposit after accusing her of breaking or stealing two venetian blinds from in the apartment.

'It was unlivable, and we weren't even living there for a month by the time the inspector came,' she said, adding: 'Like I'm going to take your s***y blinds.'

The tenants who lived right below Guisto, Vincent Lopes, said last February he filled three quarts of rainwater in 10 hours as it gushed into his apartment.

'Me and my girlfriend are just trying to get the f*** out of here,' Lopes said. 'The Laus - they're slumlords.'



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Guisto said she resorted to having a disabled neighbor help fix her apartment problems, and said the way the Laus get around helping tenants is 'evil, but it's genius in a way'

Lau defended herself as she claimed her tenants cause her repeat issues over the years, and rejects allegations that she is a 'slum landlord.'

'If I took to court every tenant who owed me money, I would have tons of cases,' she told the Standard.

But the investigation found she does have 'tons of cases', and from 1986 to 2023, she racked up over 100 lawsuits.

As many as 60 of these saw the Laus sue tenants for issues including breaking leases, withholding rent, or damaging their apartment.

In their 10 properties, the Laus have faced over 460 complaints for issues such as leaking ceilings, broken plumbing and a lack of heat, operating what the Standard described as 'shoddy apartments... becoming among the most controversial landlords in San Francisco.'



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Former tenant Grant Bremer said when he asked to break his lease because of a litany of problems, the Laus responded: 'If you want to bad mouth us, we will surely return the favor, write up how unreasonable & difficult tenant you are'

Another tenant, Grant Bremer, told the Standard investigation that the power went out the very first day he moved into the same building as Giusto, the first in a litany of alleged issues.

He said the apartment's heat would not turn on despite it being in November, internet lines were cut, and the first heavy storm caused leaks in his living and dining room ceilings.

In an example of how Lau's tenants say she stays on top of her tenants, Bremer said he received a furious reply to his offer of paying an extra month's rent if Lau let him break his lease quickly.

He said he cited city, state, and federal laws governing standards of living, to which Lau responded: 'Don't forget, there are two side (sic) to every story.

'If you want to bad mouth us, we will surely return the favor, write up how unreasonable & difficult tenant you are.'