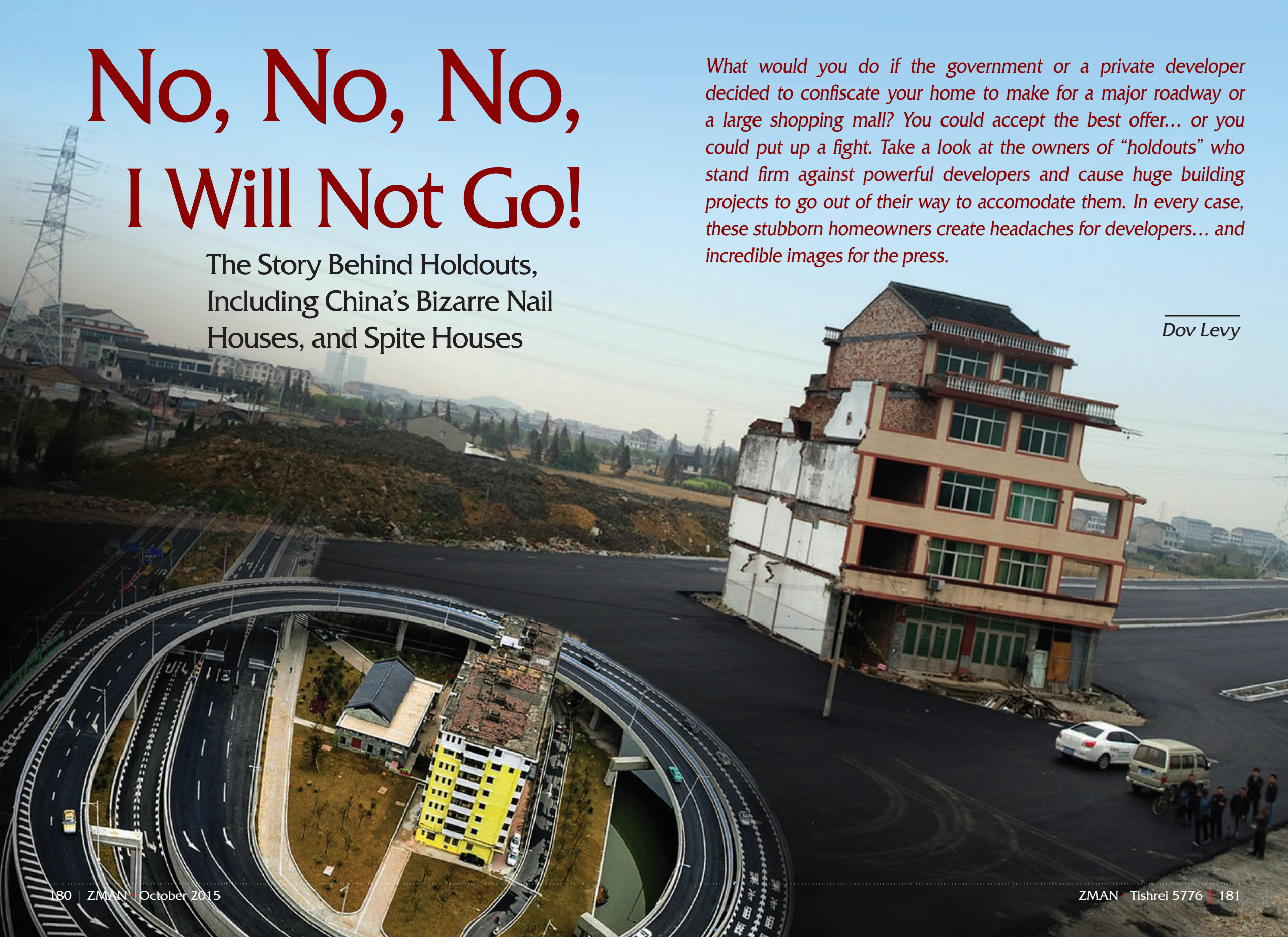


No, No, No, I Will Not Go!

The Story Behind Holdouts,
Including China's Bizarre Nail
Houses, and Spite Houses

What would you do if the government or a private developer decided to confiscate your home to make for a major roadway or a large shopping mall? You could accept the best offer... or you could put up a fight. Take a look at the owners of "holdouts" who stand firm against powerful developers and cause huge building projects to go out of their way to accomodate them. In every case, these stubborn homeowners create headaches for developers... and incredible images for the press.

Dov Levy



In 1914, New York City seized over 300 buildings in Manhattan's West Village in order to expand Seventh Avenue and a subway line. Among the confiscated buildings was a five-story building known as "The Warehouse," whose owner, David Hess, put up strong resistance. In the end, though, he lost the battle.

Under America's laws of "eminent domain," the government has the right to sequester private property when necessary in the interest of the general public. It is only obligated to pay the "fair market value" of the property seized. The city authorities had little difficulty demonstrating to the courts that the seizure of Hess' property was in the public's best interest.

In 1928, though, many years after the work was completed, Hess discovered that the survey the city had carried out at the time it took ownership of "The Warehouse"



On July 27, 1922, the Hess family installed a triangular plaque in the sidewalk stating that this property belonged to Hess and had never been ceded to the government.

had inadvertently left out one corner of the plot. This was a tiny triangular area of 27.5" by 27.5" by 25.5" of Hess' former property that was never legally transferred to the city. Hess immediately filed an official notice stating that he was reclaiming possession of this triangle.

At first the city tried to solve the issue by asking Hess to donate the minute plot, since it was too small to serve any practical purpose anyway. Hess flatly refused and put up a legal battle—which he won. He was declared legal owner of the tiny triangle, becoming landowner of New York City's smallest property.

The city had already built a sidewalk over Hess' triangle, but on July 27, 1922, the Hess family installed a black-and-yellow triangular plaque on the spot with an inscription stating that this was Hess' property and he had never ceded it to the city. The situation remained that way for years.

During the 1930s, the Hess family sold the tiny plot for \$1,000 to the owner of a cigar store whose entrance happened to be right there. The plaque remains there to this day, though it has developed signs of wear. It stands as a reminder of a citizen who stood up to the city fathers—proving that it is possible to fight city hall and win.

People such as David Hess are known as



During the 1930s, the family sold the useless plot for \$1,000 to the owner of a cigar store whose entrance opened right in front of the triangle.

"holdouts." In Hess's case, the government succeeded in taking away 99.9% of his property. On many other occasions, though, stubborn landowners managed to fight off large developers. Their homes were left standing at the center of major developments, sticking out like sore thumbs.

She Liked Her New Neighbors

Edith Macefield led a very colorful life. She spoke about serving as an agent for the British foreign intelligence service MI-6 during World War II, rubbing shoulders with Nazi VIPs, including Hitler, and spending time in Dachau before escaping—claims which have not been confirmed. She also spoke about playing the saxophone and clarinet for some of the most famous bands of her time.

Still, it was not until she was 84 that Macefield made it into the news. But it wasn't for something she did. It was for something she didn't do: She refused to sell her modest, 106-year-old bungalow for \$1 million.

Originally a fishing village predominantly populated by Scandinavian immigrants, the Ballard area remained a blue-collar neighborhood long after it was incorporated into Seattle, Washington. Macefield had



A house beneath a bridge in Zurich, Switzerland. The bridge was constructed over the house after the owner refused to leave.

lived in her home since 1952—more than half a century. By then the cheap homes were giving way to ever larger developments, trendy restaurants and shopping centers.

One commercial developer decided to build a massive five-story shopping center called Ballard Blocks in Macefield's backyard. Desperate to complete the planning, in 2006 the developer offered Macefield \$1 million for her tiny 1,000-square foot home. The offer even included building her a larger home elsewhere, complete with a wheelchair ramp; and her health-care expenses would be paid for the rest of her life.

She refused. "I don't want to move. I don't need the money. Money doesn't mean anything," Macefield told a reporter in 2007.

The developer was forced to work around her—literally—by building a large wall around her property and adjusting his plans to leave room for the stubborn octogenarian. (The plans were designed in such a way that if the property were vacated later the shopping center could easily be completed.)

When the story broke, Macefield became an overnight

LANDMARKS DOOMED FOR NEW AVENUE

Eleven Blocks to be Cut Through to Connect Seventh Avenue with Varick Street.

WORK WILL SOON BEGIN

Varick Street Widening Will Take St. John's Chapel and Some Commercial Structures.

SEVENTH AVENUE EXTENSION WILL CREATE GREAT BUSINESS REVIVAL IN OLD GREENWICH

Actual Work in Making a New West Side 100-Foot Thoroughfare to Begin Next Year—Will Mean the End of St. John's Chapel—Many Varick Street Landmarks Doomed to Destruction—Beneficial Effect Looked for in Upbuilding of Territory around Postoffice Station.

Newspaper report about the project to expand Seventh Avenue and photos of some of the buildings slated for demolition.

