

## Interview: Director Andrew Jarecki Expresses ‘All Good Things’

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- [All Good Things](#) [2]
- [Andrew Jarecki](#) [3]
- [Frank Langella](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Interview](#) [6]
- [Kirsten Dunst](#) [7]
- [Kristen Wiig](#) [8]
- [New York City](#) [9]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [10]
- [Philip Baker Hall](#) [11]
- [Ryan Gosling](#) [12]
- [Steely Dan](#) [13]

CHICAGO – Family secrets seems to be a specialty of Director Andrew Jarecki. He made a big splash with his 2003 Oscar nominated documentary, “Capturing the Friedmans,” which explored the real life matters of the title family, and in his debut feature film narrative he uncovers a prominent New York City family in “All Good Things.”

All Good Things is a fictionalized account of New York City real estate mogul Seymour Durst, called Stanford Marks (Frank Langella) in the film, and his family. His son, David Marks (Ryan Gosling), is a classic black sheep, preferring to open up a country health food store in called “All Good Things” with his new wife Katie (Kirsten Dunst), than participate in the family business. David is a dark soul, prone to inappropriate behavior, which becomes worst when he does finally come back to New York City. A mystery develops when his wife goes missing, beginning another round of odd circumstances.



Ryan Gosling as David Marks and Kirsten Dunst as Katie in ‘All Good Things’  
Photo credit: © Magnolia Pictures

Andrew Jarecki has taken his Capturing the Friedman documentary experience and has expanded it within the context of his first narrative feature. He sat down recently with HollywoodChicago.com to talk about his new film and the secrets surrounding it.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** With the first two films you’ve directed, you seem to specialize in the true life family secrets of the American Dream gone horribly wrong. What drives your particular fascination with this subject?

**Andrew Jarecki:** I think I like secrets, more than anything else. For whatever reason, I’m fascinated by people who have stories that are one step more complex than the version that you see. You see a version of Robert Durst [David Marks in All Good Things] who is the inspiration for this film, he has been painted in the media with a very colorful brush, and is certainly a burlesque figure in a lot of ways. He did these very extreme things, he ends up in Galveston, Texas, and even though he was a multi-millionaire he ends up in a \$300 a month apartment and in disguise. For me, what was at the core of this person originally and who was he before he became kind of a cartoon character in the media

was most intriguing. Most of the time you find something really interesting.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Why did you have to change the names of the characters while using their story almost verbatim? Was it because of your point-of-view in the interpretation of the story?

**Jarecki:** We didn't have to change the names, in fact we didn't change them until the very last minute before we started shooting. We didn't have any legal reasons for changing the names, the film wasn't defamatory. It might have been controversial, but it didn't rise to the level of saying anything terrible. But the main thing was when we started to work with the actors, mainly Ryan and Kirsten, there was a feeling of distraction in the process as in were they going to replicate those characters in a more specific way, such as physically.

Ryan and I had a lot of conversations about whether there should be prosthetics to make him look like the real Robert Durst, and ultimately that wasn't the purpose of the whole thing. That was not what we wanted to be focusing on. We wanted the actors to be free to experiment with variations of the characters. So if we didn't call them by the names of living people, then it wouldn't be so much creating a character that would be close to someone else but rather to create a character that would be real for them. It turned out to be a good decision.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** I read that you shot hundreds of hours of footage interviewing the real people around the circumstances of the true story, calling it part of the process. Was that in accordance with your background in documentary or was it just a way to understand the story you were about to shoot?

**Jarecki:** Probably some of each. We never planned to make a documentary out of this story, because I thought it was more interesting as a narrative. I was more interested in the emotional life of the characters, not just the facts and figures about the various cases. But in order to develop the screenplay, we wanted to collect the most interesting stories about this couple and the various events in Bob Durst's life, because those kind of quirky details is what tends to bring a story to life.

When you see the scene where Stanford Marks takes them to a rather anemic lunch after David and Katie's wedding, you see Katie's mother, who probably doesn't have enough money for parking, having to split the tab with a multi-millionaire. That was an amazing detail that we couldn't have made up. When you start with a real story, you get the benefits of the quirkiness of real life.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Ryan Gosling is a master of capturing a character, even looking physically different in each of his roles. Does he have a distinct process for finding a character, and how much of that process involved your vision of who the character was?

**Jarecki:** If you like working with actors and you're trying to get them to do something besides read the lines, and you bring in actors that are really talented like Ryan and Kirsten and Frank, the opportunity is to work together to create these characters. Part of that was me sharing details with them, filming the interviews and showing the interviews of people who knew the couple.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** In you opinion, how is the morality of ruling class wealth different in America in comparison to the presumed morality of law and order that the rest of us follow, and how was that morality played out in the film?

**Jarecki:** It's fairly common knowledge in America that people with a lot of money get to solve problems easier than people who don't. I think similarly here in this story, we found out there was a private meeting between the district attorney who was prosecuting the Durst case and the Durst family. The audience doesn't need a lot of explanation why such a meeting, which included a printout of all the contributions made by the family to the party and the governor, took place. There is a shorthand to it, to some extent.



Director Andrew Jarecki in Chicago, December 9th, 2010  
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

**HollywoodChicago.com:** There were many fantastic twists in this story, mostly involving David Marks. The tragedy of his life is markedly revealed, but why did you think that tragedy manifested itself to the point where David's morality went off the deep end?

**Jarecki:** Everybody brings a different understanding to that character, and there were people who wanted to know what went 'wrong' with him. But I don't think you get that in life. We want to know that so-and-so is schizophrenic, or has some other psychological condition. People

are strange, and many more people are strange without being diagnosed with something like mental illness.

I thought the more interesting choice was for the audience to absorb David Marks as a person, as opposed to naming his condition. It's okay to imagine that this person capable of this very extreme behavior is part of same species as you, similar to you, and comes through via Ryan Gosling in all of his complexity without necessarily labeling him.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The period film is very hard to pull off, especially in our society where everything is replaced so often. How cognizant was the production of making sure all the props and cars were time appropriate?

**Jarecki:** I must have rejected ten cars because they were one year off. The biggest example in this battle is expense, every thousand dollars becomes important. I remember getting to a location, the same location supposedly thirty years after we first visited it in the film, and yet none of bushes had moved, the grass had the same worn-out spots. I called the production designer and said the groundskeeper didn't dress the set. And he said, 'we don't have a groundskeeper.' I said all right, okay, but could you send somebody over with grass seed? Some green paint, perhaps?

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Steely Dan is featured in the soundtrack. Because their songs have a distinct perspective and complexity, why was the decision made to allow their songs to almost comment about the action as it was going on?

**Jarecki:** It does that pretty lightly, it's fairly on point in the end. I have a relationship with Donald [Fagen, of Steely Dan], who was helpful in letting me use the songs, and his wife Libby was doing the leg work, because it's owned and published by separate entities. At this point, I was thinking I would be able to maybe use one of the songs. Libby called me, and said that we'd probably be able to pull it off. She then asked, how many songs do you want to use? I just said, 'three,' and that's how I got more than one.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Going back to "Capturing the Friedmans," you got involved personally with the case, based on your opinion regarding Jesse's plea of guilty. The case recently was rendered with another opinion from the U.S. Court of Appeals. What is the current state of the case, and what outcome do you foresee?

**Jarecki:** If I had made a film about him being guilty, but secretly I felt that he was innocent, I could imagine a problem. But since the film was such that the portrayal was designed in a way for the audience to make their own decision about it, I think that's why it works, and why they reopened the case. If I had made a polemic, if it were called 'The Violation of the Friedmans,' I don't think the second highest court in the United States would have taken the time to watch it. I was happy to see that the Court of Appeals watched the film and as a result of that decided to press the Nassau County District Attorney to reopen the case. I was even happier that the DA thought it was a good idea.

Whatever you believe about the Friedman's guilt or innocence, it was clear that the way the case was prosecuted was abominable, and we absolutely pointed that out in the film. We also pointed out that Arthur Friedman was a pedophile. Those two things did co-exist. But there was also discredited investigation techniques, which exposed terrible police work, and a judge who never doubted Jesse's guilt from the onset. Just because Jesse was scared into a guilty plea, doesn't mean his father wasn't a pedophile. Both of those things can be true.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Finally, in your opinion, what do we most fear as human beings about our own secrets?

**Jarecki:** Are you saying I have secrets? [laughs]

*"All Good Things" continues its limited release in Chicago on December 24th. See theater listings for locations and showtimes. Featuring Ryan Gosling, Kirsten Dunst, Frank Langella, Kristen Wiig and Philip Baker Hall. Screenplay by Marcus Hinchey and Marc Smerling, directed by Andrew Jarecki. Rated "R"*



[14]

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