

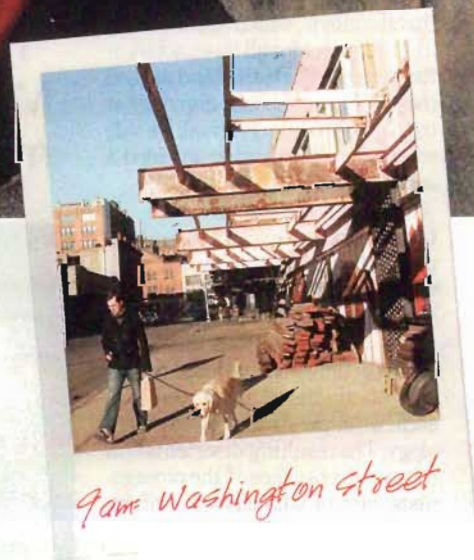
# 24

His name is James Oliver Cury, and this is the longest day of his life. Our intrepid reporter tries to survive 24 waking hours in the Meatpacking District. Photographs by **Brian Crumley**

**T**he Meatpacking District has seen it all in the 119 years since the city of New York established these cobblestone roads as an outdoor food market: blood in the streets, the foulest of smells, sex clubs, drug dealing, trannie hookers, an invasion of Euro entrepreneurs. Scariest yet, the neighborhood now has its own public-relations company and marketing campaign; Dan Klores Communications was hired in June by local business owners to let the world know that the area between Greenwich Village and Chelsea has finally become a “24-hour destination.”

The people behind this campaign—which is known as the Meatpacking District Initia-

tive (MPDI)—hope to convince people like me to convince people like you that there's more to do here than just eating, drinking and watching people on drugs make fools of themselves. They want to encourage *daytime* spending, at the new hotels, galleries, spas and boutiques. Rather than passively accept this declaration of nonstop entertainment, I decided to test the 24-hour claim by staying up from 9am on a Saturday to 9am the next morning—armed with nothing but an MPDI-sponsored map, a list of attractions I wanted to hit (organized by category), a few prearranged appointments, a notepad and a fierce determination not to fall asleep.



**9am:** Like a hunter stalking prey, I scout the periphery of the area—roughly from Ninth Avenue to the West Side Highway and from 12th Street to 15th Street. I encounter people walking their dogs, pushing strollers and sweeping sidewalks. No trannies. Just regular folks—moms, dads, tourists and store owners. It's like a Norman Rockwell painting. Safe and serene. Even the lone skateboarder wears a helmet. Searching for a morning snack, I'm drawn to a local grocery store that, aptly, labels itself



11am Stella McCartney



11am Jeffrey



3pm Rescue



7pm Macelleria

"Western Beef: The Meat Supermarket—We Know the Neighborhood."

**11am:** I start my shopping spree at the first fashion boutique to open in the Meatpacking District, back in 1999: **Jeffrey** (449 W 14th St between Ninth and Tenth Aves, 212-206-1272). A greeter at the front door welcomes me with a "hello" so ebullient I think he knows me—until I realize he's that friendly to everyone. Everything seems to cost a few hundred bucks—sneakers, shoes, jewelry, jackets, sunglasses. As I leave, I hear the greeter say, "Have a glorious day!" I want what he's on. Down the block, two British McMoney shops—**Stella McCartney** (429 W 14th St between Ninth and Tenth Aves, 212-255-1556) and **Alexander McQueen** (417 W 14th St between Ninth and Tenth Aves, 212-645-1797)—add to the area's emerging fashionista fabulousness, but they don't sell any men's clothes, so I'm left fondling women's shoes.

**Noon:** The PR folks told me to ask for a man named Podge at the members-only British club **Soho House** (29-35 Ninth Ave between 13th and 14th Sts, 212-627-9800). He shows me all the amenities that are pretty much off-limits to someone like myself.

**1pm:** Just knowing that some of the city's best beef is housed in these parts gets my salivary glands pumping. So I'm eager to check out **Pop Burger** (58-60 Ninth Ave between 14th and 15th Sts, 212-414-8686), a fast-food-joint-cum-lounge from Roy Liebenthal (Cafe Tabac, the Lemon, Pop). I order the signature dish—two adorable miniburgers in a box—along with fries, onion rings and a shake. After some observation, I deduce that the tall-and-thin crowd here must come in just to smell the food.

**2pm:** To add a little culture to my mission, I close my eyes and drop my index finger on the

"galleries" section of the map. I'm soon off to **Long Fine Art** (427 W 14th St between Ninth and Tenth Aves, 212-337-1940). Up one flight of stairs, I find two older men who seem bizarrely excited to see me—or anyone. They show me their Robert Motherwell lithos, Abstract Expressionist works that fetch between \$550 and \$5,500 apiece. We get to chatting and they launch into a history of gay-male sex clubs in the area, mentioning some I've heard of (the Anvil) and others I haven't (Mineshaft, Eagle, Hellfire). "This neighborhood used to be hard-core," says one of the guys, and it's hard to tell if he's happy or sad about the transformation.

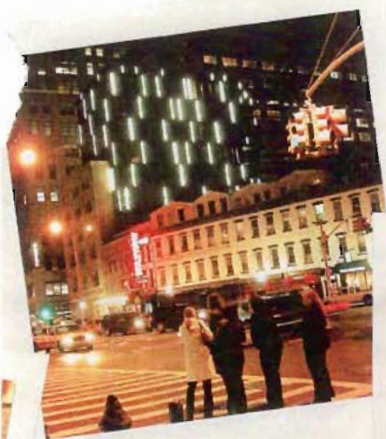
**3pm:** I've set up a manicure appointment—my first ever—at **Rescue** (34 Gansevoort St between Greenwich and Hudson Sts, 212-206-6409), just to get a taste of the spa scene. After a brief consultation, they prescribe a "recovery manicure." That sounds bad. I ask the gals if they've ever seen anyone with six toes on one foot, and to my astonishment, one of them says yes.

**5pm:** After all that pampering, I'd like nothing better than a nap, but I'm not a member of Soho House and I haven't booked a room at its accompanying hotel. So I settle for a prearranged tour of the 14-story, 187-room **Hotel Gansevoort** (18 Ninth Ave at 13th St, 212-206-6700), which is slated to open on January 19. The 31-year-old developer, Michael Achenbaum, takes me through the giant ground-floor Japanese restaurant, to be called Ono, and the roof-deck bar overlooking the Hudson, and then explains that he's also building the world's largest revolving doors—for no apparent reason. This shiny metallic phallic obstruction will undoubtedly be a hub of 24-hour action, since it's located across the cobblestones from Pastis and sits at an intersection where both Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Steve Hanson plan to open eateries as well.

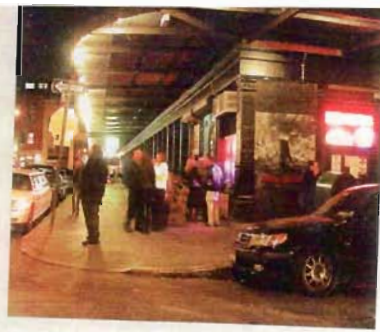
**5:30pm:** Walking along the West Side Highway, I see dilapidated piers, empty meat lockers and a bunch of skateboarders shooting a video. I introduce myself to the cameraman, who is 12. "Doesn't anyone hassle you guys?" I ask. "No one cares—we're skating on pig fat," says the leader of the pack. I look up and see that they are jumping off the graffiti-laden ledges at Premier Veal Inc.—but I refrain from explaining that veal is actually calf. Within minutes, they're huddled around me, swapping transvestite tales. I feel like I've entered the movie *Kids*. One boy describes being mugged at knife-point and points to the very corner where it happened. We part ways and one of them wishes me well from a distance: "Stay alive," he yells.

**7pm:** I feel geriatric walking into the Italian steakhouse **Macelleria** (48 Gansevoort St between Greenwich and Washington Sts, 212-741-2555) at this early hour—but I want to see if meat tastes better in the Meatpacking District. I order the porterhouse even though it's listed on the menu as "for two." It is indeed huge and delicious. By 9pm, the place is buzzing, all tables are filled, and I have my first and only quasic celebrity sighting: hotelier Ian Schrager. I am also very full.

**9:30pm:** Suddenly, it's a carnival. Stretch limos line 14th Street. Young women in high heels are getting out of taxis on every corner. Cabbies honk incessantly. There are a half dozen more bars on my neighborhood map, and I'm having trouble deciding which ones to visit—and in what order. The list includes Finally Fred's, APT, Rhone, Markt and Gaslight. Just working out the itinerary eats up



9:30pm  
West 14th Street



3:30am Hogs & Heifers



2:25am Cielo



5am Florent



7am West 13th Street

30 minutes. I dip into wine-and-tapas joint **Ara** (24 Ninth Ave between 13th and 14th Sts, 212-242-8642), where the cute bartender-actor explains that Saturday night is for tourists and the bridge-and-tunnel crowd ("they ask for Stolli or Kamikaze shots").

**11:30pm:** I'd be remiss if I didn't visit the club of the moment, which in this area is **PM** (50 Gansevoort St between Greenwich and Washington Sts, 212-255-6676)—a lounge with Haitian voodoo flourishes and a serious velvet rope. The crowd is not full of supermodels, as I had hoped, but collegiate types with good connections. The DJ is playing disco and some people do the awkward gyrate-with-drink-in-hand dance. Eventually, the excitement of making it inside gets old—especially when you're paying \$12 a drink. Back on the sidewalk, the crowd has grown; I emerge with a nonchalant strut and summon up a little been-there-done-that yawn for good measure.

**1:30am:** I imagine myself walking up to a crowd of hotties outside of **Lotus** (409 W 14th St between Ninth and Tenth Aves, 212-243-4420) and offering to get one of them in as my plus-one—and then realize that cute girls don't need my help. Instead, I find myself escorted alone to the VIP area, where I'm handed a drink and seated next to the bouncer's wife. She tells me what a great lay he is. I excuse myself and wander around Lotus's three floors—all of which are packed with pretty people considerably taller than me. I could stay here all night if I didn't have plans for the next seven hours.

**2:25am:** It's peak clubbing hour, and I nearly walk right past **Cielo** (18 Little W 12th St between Ninth Ave and Washington St, 212-645-5700); the club is hidden inside a former meat locker. Behind yet another velvet rope, a skinny little wild-haired guy with a clipboard

checks the list for my name and explains to me that, yes, he can let me in, but it's, like, the lamest crowd they've had in months. I enter anyway, check my coat, grab a drink and make my way toward the large, sunken square dance floor filled with people gettin' down...and sweaty. It's 10 degrees cooler by the bathrooms and even more pleasant in the outdoor garden—a smokers' paradise.

**3:30am:** Having had a drink every 45 minutes for the last six hours, I consult my map and decide it's time to...go to another bar. At **Hogs & Heifers** (859 Washington St at 13th St, 212-929-0655), the weekday battalion of bikers and rednecks has been replaced by frat and sorority types. Inside, the all-female bartending staff plays the badass-babes role to the hilt. I watch one bartender jump onto the bar, grab a guy by the arm and yell in his face, "Asshole, learn how to tip!"

**4am:** Last call comes out of nowhere. The big bad bouncers force us to leave immediately, and no, you can't take your drink outside. A creepy lawyer with bad hair offers to accompany me in my aimless, meandering jaunt through the neighborhood. Together, we observe lame pickup artists: A pair of scary men decked out in leather trench coats are desperately hitting on women outside of Lotus. Garbage trucks are picking up mounds of trash. A more immediate issue: Where does one pee around here? The PR people have one suggestion for activities after 4am: Go to **Florent** (69 Gansevoort St between Greenwich and Washington Sts, 212-431-6959), the pioneering French diner-bistro that settled here back in 1985.

**5am:** While Nick's City Diner sits at the busy intersection of Ninth Avenue and 14th Street, it is

empty. Florent, on the other hand, is packed with all breeds of hipster. The man behind the counter, wearing black fingernail polish and a perpetual smirk, tells me about several places to go after the after-hours dining—none of which are in this neighborhood. Glancing at the menu, I realize I don't want a cheeseburger or fries; I want a bed.

**6:15am:** The attorney and I wander the streets chatting with anyone who will talk to us. A man hosing down the sidewalk in front of Markt says we won't see any other people until about 8am—though it would be bustling with meatpackers (and probably a few streetwalkers) at this hour any weekday. A posse of pimps, prostitutes and other unsavories is hanging on the corner of 14th and Hudson Street—though there are none of the famed trannie hookers (apparently, Saturday-night tourists are kryptonite to them).

**7am:** The supermarket opens and I actually find this exciting. I still can't shake this lawyer guy. We hear some loud music and follow our ears to a disco-blaring, ultrabright 24-hour gas station on Tenth Avenue and 14th Street. Either I'm hallucinating or this seems like an empty outdoor disco—with gas pumps. We go inside the adjoining store and survey the selection of air fresheners and candy bars. Maybe the PR folks should add this place to their list of all-night attractions.

**8am:** We've exhausted our options, so we part ways. The conclusion: The Meatpacking District is really more of a 20-hour destination, though I might feel differently if I were seeking vices rather than sleep. To those who want to test the 24-hour potential of the area themselves, I suggest you wait a few more months for new hotels and restaurants to open—or find a map that lists places like Mineshaft, Eagle and Hellfire on it. ■