

# Florent: Queen of the Meat Market

## [VIDEO]

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**By Jennifer Morton (Managing Editor, POZ) and Dennis Daniel (Comptroller, Smart + Strong)**

Once upon a time there was a legendary eatery tucked away in the middle of a non-descript block of New York City's Meatpacking District. It was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and, depending on what time you ventured in, you might encounter meatpackers, leather daddies, club kids, businessmen, parents and their kids, transgender streetwalkers or world-famous celebrities. Restaurant Florent, named after its owner Florent Morellet, served up delectable food and entertaining ambiance from 1985 until 2008, when it was forced to close its doors due to skyrocketing rent--a casualty of the neighborhood's gentrification and popularity.

For many years, Restaurant Florent was known as the unofficial POZ cafeteria. Until the fall of 2004, the POZ offices were located just down the street, and staffers would often gather at the eatery for an out-of-office meeting or to grab a quick bite with a writer or a client. The edit staff would often have dinner delivered from Florent during late-night closes. Former editor-in-chief Walter Armstrong had a particular fondness for the rice pudding. 

June 24 was the world premiere of David Sigal's documentary honoring Florent and his celebrated establishment. *Florent: Queen of the Meat Market* was screened in Chelsea as part of the NYC Food Film Festival, which pairs great films with, well, great food. The evening began with a VIP cocktail reception and featured some familiar items from Florent's menu including seared rare ahi tuna, prosciutto and pâté de campagne. The reception felt like a family reunion as we recognized several of Florent's former waiters and hostesses and saw the familiar faces of people we had broken bread (and mussels and steak frites!) with over the years.

Here's video from the event:

The host for the evening was the drag king comedian (and former POZ staffer) Murray Hill. After a short introduction from the festival director and the festival's executive chef and a few words from the film's director and Florent himself, it was time for the main event.

The documentary is a valentine to Florent. The film recounts the history of the man behind the

restaurant. In addition to capturing him dressing up like a very saucy Marie Antoinette for the restaurant's annual Bastille Day party and, on a different occasion, chartering a bus to Washington, DC, for a pro-choice rally, the documentary includes vintage clips and interviews with Florent, his flamboyant staff and many of the famous faces that frequented the restaurant, including Julianne Moore, Isaac Mizrahi, Robin Byrd, Michael Musto, Christo and Jeanne-Claude and Diane von Furstenberg, as well as POZ founder Sean Strub.

Florent discovered that he was HIV positive soon after he opened the restaurant. In the film, he talks candidly about how he decided to not only be open about his status, but to make it a visible part of the decor by posting his lab numbers on the menu boards above the bar. At the time, it was a brave decision because the restaurant was just starting to gain attention and popularity. Many felt that his disclosure would be the restaurant's downfall. But the eatery prevailed. And it was just one of the many examples in the film of Florent's courage and his commitment to activism.

Florent was also committed to preserving the neighborhood where his bistro was located. As more and more trendy shops and nightclubs moved into the Meatpacking District, he lobbied tirelessly and eventually succeeded in establishing the area as a historical landmark.

We particularly enjoyed the segment of the film that captured the making of the cover of POZ's [10th anniversary issue](#). Sean Strub came up with the idea to get Spencer Tunick--the artist well known for his large installations of nude people--to create our May 2004 POZ cover. Florent happily offered his restaurant as the locale for the shoot. So one chilly day in early February, nearly 100 HIV-positive individuals (including Florent) gathered in the restaurant and posed for our cover in their birthday suits.

After the film ended, a curtain in the screening room was dramatically opened to reveal an area specifically designed for the after party, complete with a makeshift bar that served as a runway and stage. Murray Hill continued his duties as host and introduced performances by Florent regulars Tiger!, Penny Arcade, Dirty Martini, Lucy Sexton and the Pink Pickles. Former POZ staffer Josh Sparber manned the DJ booth as the crowd sampled even more Florent delicacies.

As we sipped our acai berry cocktails and mingled with other ex-POZ employees such as Alison Zack (who provided website support to Florent) and Tim Murphy (who posed for the 10th anniversary cover) we couldn't help but feel a bit nostalgic. Florent was a magical place where you could always feel comfortable in your own skin--even if you weren't wearing any clothes!

[Click here](#) to watch a trailer of the documentary and to see pics from the event.