

# Cellar, beware!

ENTER **TRACY WESTMORELAND'S** NOW-ICONIC HELL'S KITCHEN HOLE IN THE WALL—WHICH MAKES GRENDEL'S LAIR LOOK LIKE BALTHAZAR—AND YOU MAY NEVER LEAVE...OR WANT TO. BY CHRIS WILSON

**T**racy Westmoreland greets friends who enter his stalactite-encrusted Hell's Kitchen funhouse with a bear hug and the raspy exclamation, "I love this guy!" If you are, in fact, a female, he will more likely lift you off your feet and faux-purr, "I luvvvv you, baby!"

He keeps cold Budweiser bottles in your hand no matter how fast you drink them, and, if you let him, will regale you with wild stories until well past the imaginary last call, when the sun starts to creep over the Port Authority across the street. You stay there because Westmoreland, 49, is like a benevolent black hole, sucking your attention away from the decrepitude of your surroundings with sheer charisma and unflagging optimism. To women, he is a Pappa Bear presence, who never crosses the line (but for maybe a welcome butt-slap).

If only his landlord—currently trying to evict him, again—would come around to joining the fan club. But he's been in this situation before. In 2000, Westmoreland, a sometime actor and "Page Six" favorite, was ousted from Siberia's original location, an underground rec room, inside the 1-9 subway station on West 50th Street and Broadway, after a dispute with a different landlord.

And so the "nightlife outlaw" role is nothing new to him, and hardly seems to raise his hackle, or blood pressure (he needs no help there). "Listen, nobody's trying to kill us, and nobody's trying to put us in jail," he recently asided to me, nudging me across the room. Then he laughed, and handed me another beer.

Catching up with Westmoreland is the draw—like a fly to a cow patty—but Siberia has its singular charms. It's rarely crowded. It's cheap as dirt. And it's got three killer jukeboxes: one on the top floor, one in the basement, and a third in a secret "VIP room" (actually a closet-sized space littered with trash

and lit by a single bare bulb). This niche, which Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs* may have taken a shine (and a size 14 victim) to, is reserved for the burly barkeep and a handful of old-school Siberians ("Where's *George*? He said he'd be here!")

The jukebox selections range from the Dead Boys to Chuck Berry, David Allan Coe to ELO. Sometimes the top floor might be rattling with "The Seeker" (The Who) and downstairs there are a couple of pretty girls drunkenly twirling around to "Sheila Take a Bow" (The Smiths). Though truth be told, you generally have to meet those girls at Bungalow 8, then convince them that "the greatest goddamned bar in the world" is just a short cab ride away.

It's a place where, if you stumble in at the right time, you can bend elbows with over-served tabloid journalists, slumming local politicians, neighborhood freaks, errant trannies ("Oooh, baby, it's *cold!*"), previous and current cast members of "Saturday Night Live," and other slumming-it celebrities who get caught and plastered in Siberia's glue-trap. (Note to Paris Hilton: Don't want to get caught with your panties down by awaiting paparazzi? Come to Siberia!)

Have I ever shared a smoke with Heather Graham in the basement? Downed shots with Lou Dobbs? Picked out punk rock singles with Michael Imperioli? Sure, I have! But Siberia isn't so much a "scene" as it is a state of mind. I'm not sure exactly what that state of mind is, but it's warm and hazy and you'll know it when it washes over you. It's a place to clink beers with old friends. To bask in the feel-good glow of the King of Siberia. To drink and smoke and joke until you absolutely, positively, have got to get the hell out of there. And to wear your inevitable hangover like a crown of glory when you wake up the next day.



LOVE AMONG  
RUINS: Tracy  
Westmoreland,  
after the flood, in  
Siberia's basement.