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# Merry Christmas

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# In the footsteps of Poirot

Camera in hand, **David Suchet** takes a trip on the Orient Express – scene of Hercule Poirot's most famous case

**Agatha Christie's Poirot**  
Christmas Day 9pm **ITV1**  
**David Suchet on the Orient Express**  
Sunday 19 December 9pm **ITV1**

## All aboard in London

When I was first contracted to play Poirot in 1987, I only knew the films, the most famous being *Murder on the Orient Express*. So to celebrate I took my wife on a trip on the Orient Express. When I found out I was filming the story for this Christmas I decided it was a journey I had to make again. It's so hard to get back into Poirot. I have to watch up to 12 hours of old *Poirot* episodes to become "that little man". Making the journey was vital for me to get into the part.

Before I even got on the train, in the ticket office people were approaching me saying, "I hope there isn't going to be a murder!" I kept thinking back to that first time when I walked all over the train undisturbed. In that way *Poirot* has changed my life.

Victoria Station holds the most horrible ghosts for me – of being sent off to boarding school at the age of eight, in my short trousers and cap. The place fills me with foreboding. But the minute I boarded the Pullman that disappeared.

## Arriving in Calais

When we got to Calais all the staff were lined up outside the train – not just for me, they do it for everyone – but I was asked to walk down the line and greet them all (right). I almost felt like visiting royalty – they started bowing to me. Awkward actually – very strange.

**MYSTERY MAN**  
In the Lalique dining car – complete with cocktail and crew-member badge



**THE JOURNEY BEGINS**  
David Suchet boards the Orient Express back in 1987



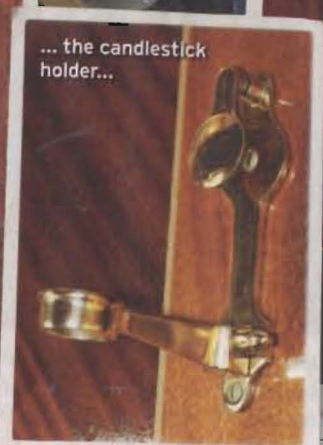
**CURTAIN CALL**  
The staff and crew line up to take a bow in Calais



... the wash basin (one click and it's closed)



**THE LITTLE DETAILS**  
The fob watch holder...



... the candlestick holder...



## Back to the cabin – it's all in the details

As soon as I started to unpack in my cabin I became aware of the book – Agatha Christie was so evocative and precise. My carriage was exactly like the one she describes.

I decided to take photographs for the drama designers, so that they could re-create the carriage exactly as it was. Look out for the fob holder for my watch in the film (far left) – it's exactly the same as the real thing. Nobody knew the candlestick holder in the corridor existed (second left) until I came back with the pictures, so we had them made. Poirot is famous for paying attention to "the little details" – thank goodness I'm a detail merchant, too.

## Cocktails before dinner

Getting ready for dinner in my black tie and walking to the Lalique dining car was a magical moment. When I walked in, the pianist played the *Poirot* theme tune and the barman prepared me a delicious *Poirot* cocktail (above). After dinner, I zoomed into my suitcase to get the book out. I wanted to read it while on the train so I was up until 3am. I could hear doors opening and closing, and wash basins clicking (left).

**ONE MAN AND HIS CAMERA**  
The end of the trip, sightseeing in Venice



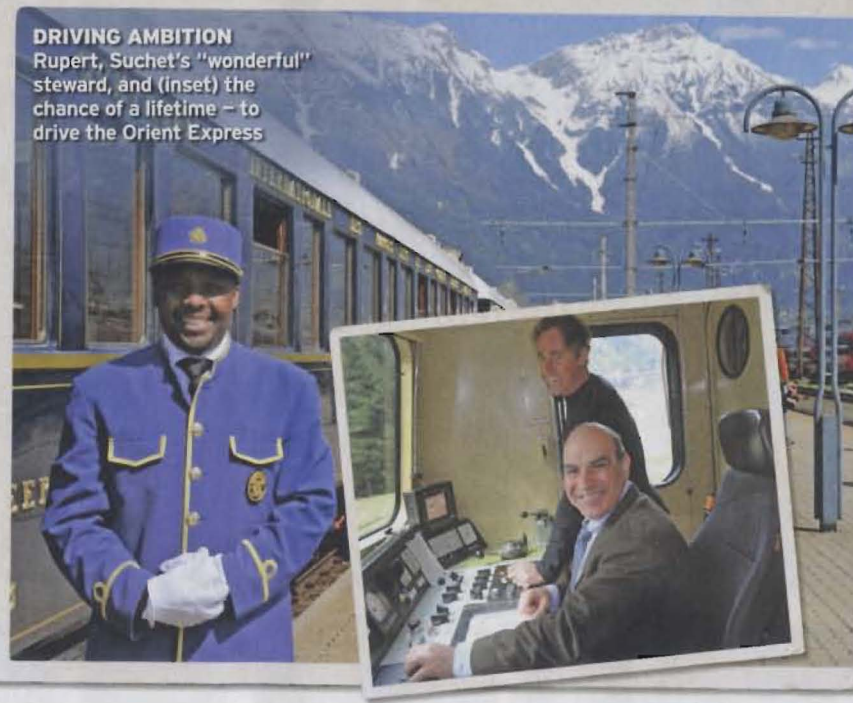
## In the driver's seat – Innsbruck to Venice

At Innsbruck I was told I could drive the train. I'm the only person, other than the drivers, who has driven the *Orient Express*. To take the wheel they made me a crew member. Full steam ahead to Venice – the most magnificent end to my journey.

*Murder on the Orient Express* is my 65th *Poirot* and I was frightened about making the most iconic of them all. Now there are only six more to go. To complete the lot would be extraordinary, but tinged with sadness because I won't do the last five without them letting me do the book in which *Poirot* dies. A quarter of a century on, it will be difficult to wave goodbye to "that little man". **As told to Alexia Skinitis**

More pictures of David Suchet documenting his journey at: [radiotimes.com/david-suchet](http://radiotimes.com/david-suchet)

**DRIVING AMBITION**  
Rupert, Suchet's "wonderful" steward, and (inset) the chance of a lifetime – to drive the Orient Express



## GREAT DETECTIVES

### LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

**Wallander** Sat 18, Mon 20 Dec/Boxing Day **BBC4**  
Two new dramas with Rolf Lassgard as the handdog Swedish cop.

**The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency**  
Sun 19 December **BBC4**  
The feature-length first episode: the last work by acclaimed director Anthony Minghella.

**Timeshift: Nordic Noir/Italian Noir**  
Mon 20/Mon 27 Dec **BBC4**  
Your complete guide to continental cops.

**Agatha Christie's Marple: The Secret of Chimneys/The Blue Geranium** Mon 27/Wed 29 Dec **ITV1 (not STV)**  
Two new dramatisations, starring Julia McKenzie as Miss Marple.

**Inspector Montalbano**  
Mon 27 December **BBC4**  
A welcome repeat for the Sicilian gumshoe.