

Guilbert combines trains, travel and food in Dinner on the Diner

Food, trains and travel are popular programming themes with Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) audiences in the United States. Filmmaker Jonathan Guilbert combined all three of those subjects in a four-part PBS series titled **Dinner on the Diner**. Each one-hour segment features a celebrity chef preparing and sampling their specialty cuisine, while travelling on a luxury train to an exotic locale.

Guilbert says the idea for the series came out of his interest in trains and serendipity. While visiting a producer at a public television station in New Hampshire, he saw a magazine about model trains and the two of them got to talking. The producer had an idea for a series of half-hour shows about railroad dining trains in North America.

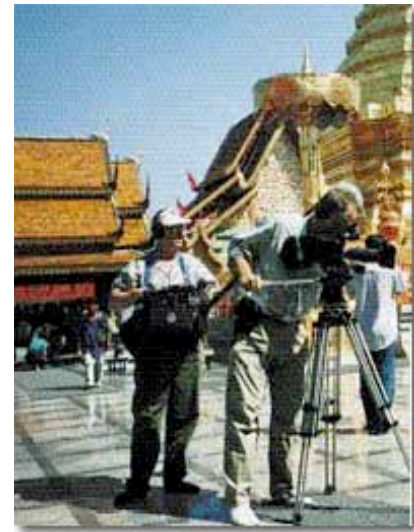
"It was a nice idea," says Guilbert, "but it wasn't enough on its own. It needed filling out and by combining TV chefs travelling to exotic places on high-end luxury trains it worked."

Guilbert's research unveiled a colorful roster of host-chefs and locations. He filmed segments with Dorinda Hafner riding the Union Limited through South Africa and former Galloping Gourmet Graham Kerr travelling to the Scottish Highlands on The Royal Scotsman. He captured Martin Yan, of **Yan Can Cook**, journeying from Singapore to Bangkok on the Eastern and Oriental Express and Mary Ann Esposito touring southern Spain aboard the Al Andalus Expreso. Each show featured a hearty mixture of humor, historical and cultural insights and food as well as trains in breath-taking scenery.

Guilbert produced, directed, edited and photographed **Dinner on the Diner**.



"I had a tight budget and a very strong idea, and figured that was the best way to get my films made the way I saw them," he says. "Actually shooting the films was a very creative form of expression. I feel more connected to the person on the other side of the camera. I befriended each of the chefs, so they felt comfortable and dropped their guard. They trusted me and forgot I had a camera on my shoulder."



▲ Jonathan Guilbert (right) and soundman G. John Garrett (left) on location at the Buddhist Temple Chiang Mai. (PHOTO: RON WYMAN)



▲ Chef Martin Yan of **Yan Can Cook** (far left) and Guilbert (right) catch a ride while visiting the Lahu Village in Northern Thailand. (PHOTO: RON WYMAN)

Guilbert was determined to shoot on film. "I was secure in the knowledge that I was recording superb images," he explains. "In my experience, the relative cost of shooting film versus video is actually small, and film is compatible with all video formats."

Guilbert traveled light, carrying an Aaton XTR Plus Super 16 camera. He mainly worked with a Canon 8:64mm zoom lens, and occasionally, a Canon 300mm lens with a 2X extender for close-ups, or a Zeiss Distagon 9.5mm lens in tight spots. Much of the series was produced in available light, but Guilbert carried a small lighting package, consisting of three 200 watt HMIs, for emergencies.

He talks about filming a formal dinner in The Royal Scotsman dining car. "It was a highlight on the trip, so the staff insisted on subdued lighting in the dining car," he explains. "I had to rely on available light, which was bouncing around, providing a source of ambient light. Even with the Kodak Vision 500T, I was a stop under-exposed. I was amazed at how well it held together. The grain came up a little bit, but the faces were lit correctly."

In addition to PBS outlets, **Dinner on the Diner** will also be seen in Finland, Hong Kong, Italy, New Zealand, Spain and the United Kingdom. Film has a fantasy quality, which was right for this story, and Guilbert notes that it is HDTV-ready for future syndication.

"The negative has been conformed to the edit decision list, and it has been cut flash to flash," he explains. "We are HD compatible, and we have a timeless topic."

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