



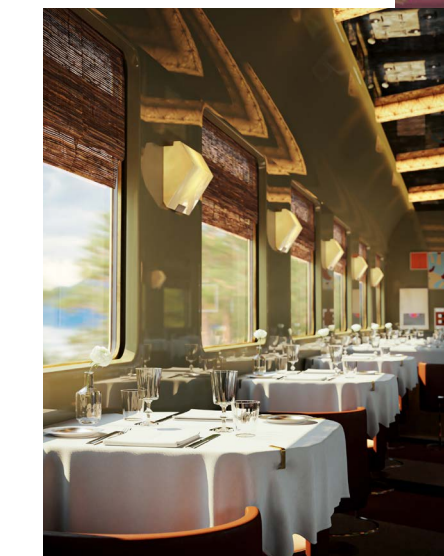
The design dispatch

Romance of the Rails

EDWINA HART ON HER LOVE AFFAIR WITH RAILWAY JOURNEYS AND THEIR MODERN-DAY RENAISSANCE AS THE NEXT BIG THING IN SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL.

I've always romanticised railway journeys. I wouldn't exist if it weren't for my parents meeting on a snowed-in Swiss train in the winter of 1982. Severe weather conditions meant the trip from Lausanne to London was derailed, forcing passengers to alight in Paris, where my parents spent a few magical hours running around the City of Love. Who wouldn't fall head over heels? It's basically the script from Richard Linklater's cult 1995 film *Before Sunrise*.

I was seduced by the charms of train travel in my twenties: the slow, meandering pace; the cinematic scenery unfolding outside my window; the rhythmic sound of the wheels rattling along the track as I drifted off to sleep. I was enamoured with sumptuous Pullman-style carriages that transported me back to the 'Golden Age' of train travel and the cast of characters worthy of an Agatha Christie mystery who'd mingle over G&Ts in the bar car. At that time, luxury locomotives weren't particularly fashionable; they were primarily



the domain of retired British men with a penchant for pastel-hued preppy blazers and smoking cigars on the observation deck.

Lately, there's a renewed interest in train travel – it's a modern-day renaissance. We are in the era of *flygskam* (flight shame): a Swedish neologism that's taken off. If jet-setting is passé, riding the rails is de rigueur. The latest Scandi buzzword to enter our lexicon is *tågskrut* (train bragging) – showing off your low-carbon footprint on social media. Pinterest – the virtual mood board widely utilised by design lovers – released an end-of-year report with predictions for emerging trends for 2023. The search for Pinterest pins for 'train trip aesthetic' increased by 205 per cent from September 2020 to September 2022. Gen Z and my fellow millennials are now well and truly onboard.

As a result of this growing movement towards sustainable travel, premium train operators are capitalising on the newfound enthusiasm for a mode of transportation considered outdated. These top-tier trains give passengers something to brag about – deluxe cabins with en suite bathrooms, lavishly appointed dining carriages that serve multi-course meals with silver service, onboard spas and 24-hour butler service.

Belmond has been the bastion of glamorous, old-world train travel for decades,

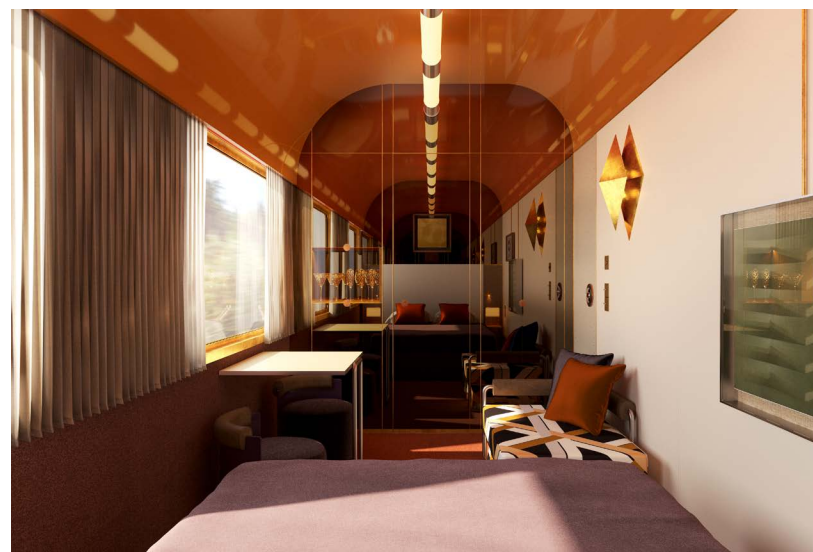
commanding stylishly restored vintage trains that make tracks across Europe, Asia and South America. Renowned American travel writer Paul Theroux once said: "I have seldom heard a train go by and not wished I was on it." I have not heard of a Belmond train I haven't wished I was on. The legendary *Venice Simplon-Orient-Express* is the epitome of elegance with Art Deco carriages and a restaurant car adorned with original René Lalique glass. Handcrafted 1920s Grand Suites are the latest chapter of this storied train; these recent additions make the classic voyage from London to Venice even more extravagant.

I always find myself marvelling at the thoughtful design details that reflect the route of each of Belmond's sleepers: cherrywood panelling and Jim Thompson Thai silks on the *Eastern & Oriental Express*, which breezes through jungles in Southeast Asia; the *Royal Scotsman's* mahogany-clad interiors and tartan fabrics; and vibrant Peruvian textiles, earthy tones and alpaca wool on the contemporary-style *Andean Explorer* that weaves towards Lake Titicaca.

Wes Anderson fans will delight in the *British Pullman* that departs from London Victoria Station. In 2021, Belmond enlisted the famous film director to makeover one of the 1950s-era parlour cars with his signature whimsical flair. However, there's no better way to experience a real-life immersion in a Wes Anderson fantasy than onboard *Maharajas' Express*. My eight-day Indian Splendour odyssey around Rajasthan was just the ticket – a riot of colour straight out of *The Darjeeling Limited*.



PHOTOGRAPHY: EDWINA HART (MAHARAJAS' EXPRESS); VIEW FROM OBSERVATION DECK, EASTERN & ORIENTAL EXPRESS; EASTERN & ORIENTAL EXPRESS DINING CARRIAGE; DUNDEE STUDIO (ORIENT EXPRESS); LA DOLCE VITA; MAXIME D'ANGEAC AND MARTIN DARTZACQ (ACCOR ORIENT EXPRESS); REPUBLIC OF FLORENCE (NARDI DUFFLE BAG)



I'm thrilled that the train travel trend shows no signs of slowing down. French hospitality group Accor unveiled their latest venture – a spare-no-expense iteration of the iconic *Orient Express* reimagined by French architect Maxime d'Angeac (known for his work with Hermès). And I'm counting down the days until it rolls out in early 2025 with a fleet of fabulously retrofitted cars with Roaring Twenties appeal. Meanwhile, the *Orient Express La Dolce Vita* – with a retro Italian twist – celebrates the craftsmanship and creativity of 1960s Italian design. The sun-drenched itineraries through Italy commence in 2024. So sign me up for the Sicilian sojourn and hand me an Aperol spritz.

But first, my love affair with trains continues as I set off on my next railroad adventure on the *Rocky Mountaineer* – where we'll wind through a winter wonderland of the snow-capped Canadian Rockies. Trends may come and go, but when it comes to train travel, we're full steam ahead for a more stylish and sustainable future. **IT**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Peek inside the Presidential Suite onboard Accor's new Orient Express; *A journey into luxury with Orient Express La Dolce Vita*; *Expect silver service onboard Maharajas' Express*; *Find a retro Italian twist onboard Orient Express La Dolce Vita*; *Enjoy dinner with a view on the Eastern & Oriental Express*; *Move to the observation deck to catch the sunset*.

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