

# The Gazette

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## Everyone's an expert as TV's CSI craze raises the bar for police

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THE GAZETTE

Tapping his toe to a rock music beat, Sûreté du Québec forensic scientist Alexandre Beaudoin peers at an eerily green, laser-lit

handprint. Just then, his sexy colleague saunters over, whispers in his ear and, minutes later, they nab the murderer.

Just kidding. This isn't a TV crime drama like the immensely popular CSI, short for crime

scene investigation, and now part of the modern lexicon.

In real life, Beaudoin usually works alone and some lab tests can take days or (groan!) weeks.

Yet the "CSI effect" is being felt by police forces and in the

judicial system, a conference on crime-solving techniques was told yesterday in Montreal.

It seems everyone is an expert in the latest detective methods. Crime victims are disappointed when local police don't show up

with high-tech lights to check for prints after a break-in, and jurors are surprised when there is no forensic evidence, like DNA, to lock in a verdict.

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DAVE SIDAWAY THE GAZETTE

Alexandre Beaudoin demonstrates a fingerprint detection technique he discovered. It is now used in Canada, Australia and Sweden.

## CSI Forensics solve less than 1% of cases

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"And we don't drive Hummers," Beaudoin, 29, said wryly.

Benoît Dupont, a professor of criminology at the Université de Montréal and associate director of the International Centre for Comparative Criminology, said CSI has changed the expectations people have of policing.

"Nearly everything they do on TV, police can do in reality. It just takes a lot longer and costs an awful lot," Dupont said on the opening day of the week-long 30th annual conference of the Canadian Identification Society.

More than 125 people – including crime-scene technicians, fingerprint analysts, entomologists and blood-spatter experts – are meeting for the conference at a downtown hotel.

Although the conviction rate in Canada is about 20-per-cent lower than in the United States, the reason is most likely a higher threshold of evidence placed on prosecutors by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and not different police methods, Dupont explained.

The average budget for a CSI episode is \$3 million, about the equivalent of the annual budget of a crime lab in a mid-size North American city, he added.

But to say that CSI has altered detectives' actual methods is like saying Star Trek influenced the U.S. space program, he said.

"Investigators don't just stumble on evidence and discover a slam-dunk way to solve the case very often," he said.

In fact, less than one per cent of crimes are solved using forensic evidence, he said.

"Juries are disappointed when they see that the evidence in a trial is just from two or three plain old eyewitnesses."

The three CSI shows, set in Las Vegas, Miami and New York, respectively, consistently rank in the top 10 shows in Canada and, combined, attract more than 7 million Canadian viewers weekly, according to BBM Nielsen Media Research.

The public's interest in CSI has inspired innovations in the field, such as better, more compact equipment, Beaudoin said.

Beaudoin himself has become somewhat of a star, as a method

for fingerprint detection he discovered is now becoming accepted worldwide. He demonstrated the technique for the media at the SQ's crime lab on Parthenais St. yesterday.

What he discovered is that dipping paper, cardboard or wood in Oil Red O, a liquid colourant commonly used in biology, reveals latent fingerprints in anywhere from five to 90 minutes, depending on the material's condition.

Until two years ago, there was no way to detect prints on wet or previously wet paper or wood, he said. Evidence on a sunken ship, for example, couldn't be checked for fingerprints.

Beaudoin's procedure is now standard for police in Canada, Australia and Sweden. The Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States is considering teaching the procedure to its students.

"I feel like I did something for my field," Beaudoin said proudly yesterday, as TV news cameras captured the moment.

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