

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's chef Antony Worrall Thompson



'People assume I'm arrogant and a hard nut in the kitchen, but I'm shy and that can come across as aloof. I'm a pussycat'

The prized possession you value above all others... My collection of antique cookbooks. I have about 400 dating back to the 1500s at my home near Henley.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not seeing my two boys – Blake, 32, and Sam, 30 – from my second marriage grow up. I separated from their mother when they were two and one and they grew up in Australia.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Buying clothes on impulse for my wife Jay. I'm good at choosing for her, but it gets expensive and sometimes she says, 'I'm not a teenager you know!'

The unending quest that drives you on... Giving pleasure to people with food and service.

Right: Boudicca. Above right: a flower arrangement. Far right: the northern lights in Iceland



The book that holds an everlasting resonance... A Passage To India by EM Forster. My grandparents lived there before Partition. Forster brilliantly evokes the country in those days.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd witness a heart transplant operation. What are the surgeons thinking when they take out the old heart and put a new one in?

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Criticism of the NHS. It's put under intolerable strain, not least with immigration. We should be more proud of it.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Boudicca. She was ballsy to take on the Romans; I'd like to know how she made a nation rise up.

The film you can watch time and time again... Blue Velvet, a psychological horror story that takes the mickey out of the underlying weirdness of American society.

The person who has influenced you most... Jay. She's changed me from being an introvert who didn't really like people to someone with a bit of charisma and personality.



The piece of wisdom you'd pass on to a child... The people that matter don't mind, and the people who mind don't matter.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Flower arranging. I find it very peaceful to collect wild flowers and make something beautiful with them.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My religious faith. I no longer believe in God because religion causes so much destruction.

The poem that touches your soul... The Irish writer Michael Feeney Callan's collection of poems called Fifty Fingers. They're full of pain and love.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm very arrogant and a hard nut in the kitchen. I'm very shy on a one-to-one basis and that can come across as aloof. I'm a pussycat in the kitchen.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Meeting Jay in the early 90s. I thought I'd been in love before, but this has been different. We got married in 1996 and since then she's made me a whole person.

The crime you'd commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd assassinate Robert Mugabe. Zimbabwe is a beautiful country with wonderful people but he's turned it into a backyard tip.

The song that means most to you... A Whiter Shade Of Pale by Procol Harum. It takes me back to teenage days when I made a fool of myself with women.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd wake up at Strawberry Hill hotel in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica where you look down on the clouds and the jungle. After breakfast I'd take an armed escort to tour the rough areas of Kingston's Trench Town, which I find fascinating, then have a beer on the beach watching fishermen bring in the catch. I'd meet Jay for lunch with our kids – Toby, 20, and Billie, 18 – at La Colombe d'Or hotel in Saint-Paul de Vence, South of France, before stopping at the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in nearby Antibes on the off-chance Joan Collins is there! We saw her there once and she was a

scream. I'd have a gin martini at Le Club 55 in St Tropez at sundown then head to Sydney to take Blake and Sam out for a serious supper at Quay restaurant – mud crab, abalone and wagyu beef. I'd end the day partying at the Kaffibarinn bar in Reykjavik with Jay, Toby and Billie. At some point I'd slip out for a cigar to watch the northern lights.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Winning the Meilleur Ouvrier de Grande Bretagne in 1987 – it's like the Olympics of cooking. I was quite new to the game and some people thought I was a cowboy, but I proved myself.

The saddest time that shook your world... The death of my grandfather Ronald when I was 13. He'd taken me under his wing and I loved him to bits.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I'm 64 now and I want to live to see Toby and Billie get married.

The philosophy that underpins your life... There's no point tiptoeing through life, hoping to get to death safely. I like living to the full.

The order of service at your funeral... People must wear bright colours, have fun and celebrate my life because it's been a good one. I want my coffin carried out to the Chariots Of Fire music.

The way you want to be remembered... He wouldn't take no for an answer!

The Plug... Antony's restaurants include The Greyhound near Henley, Oxfordshire, and Kew Grill in south-west London. Visit awtrestaurants.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: REX, ALAMY, GETTY

PS...

Kate Winslet plays a Mafia moll in gripping crime thriller Triple 9 – in cinemas from Friday. Jeff Wayne's War Of The Worlds opens at London's Dominion Theatre on Wednesday. And Yoko Ono's new album, Yes, I'm A Witch Too, is released on Friday



NEXT WEEK

- Sit back and marvel at the incredible winning entries in our fabulous wildlife photo contest
- Hugh Laurie on his gripping new spy drama
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings