

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's novelist Santa Montefiore's turn

The prized possession you value above all others... My antique engagement ring with three diamonds. It was handed down in my husband's family on his father's side. Sebag [history author Simon Sebag Montefiore] gave it to me in 1997 and we married a year later.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... I wish I'd spent more time with my sister Tara [socialite Tara Palmer-Tomkinson who died on 8 February from natural causes], especially in the last year of her life. She had not been well, so she was elusive. I miss her so much.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Sugar. I have a particular weakness for Werther's Original sweets.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... A New Earth by Eckhart Tolle is about conquering the ego and living in the now.

The poem that touches your soul... A traditional Gaelic blessing that begins, 'May the road rise up to meet you.' It's deeply spiritual.

Right: Santa's late sister Tara. Above right: tarot cards. Far right: the Arizona desert

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd sit in the woods at our cottage in Hampshire at dusk and watch the night animals, like foxes and owls, come to life.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Patronising men – normally City bankers – who I meet at dinner parties and they say, 'So, do you make any money from writing?' in a tone that makes it sound like it's a little hobby that I do with a quill in a leaking attic.

The film you can watch time and time again... The Bridges Of Madison County with Clint Eastwood and Meryl Streep. It's such a beautiful, touching love story and I always cry.

The person who has influenced you most... Sebag. He's so perceptive about people and he has taught me how to observe. If not for his example I wouldn't be able to write the books I do.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Eva Perón. People loved her or hated her, so she was either a saint or a monster. I'd like to know the truth and make up my own mind.



'I'm fascinated by life after death. I'm psychic and I've seen spirits – I dabble in tarot cards too'



The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Stick up for yourself. You deserve respect.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I'm drawn to the paranormal and I'm fascinated by life after death. I'm psychic and I've seen spirits. I dabble in tarot cards too.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My youth. I'm 47 and I keep very fit, but I played lacrosse for England when I was young and I'd like my teenage body back.

The unending quest that drives you on... To make my next book better than the previous one.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm prim and a goody-goody. I'm actually very worldly and nothing shocks me.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... The year I spent in Argentina when I was 19 – my mother Patty is Anglo-Argentine. I based my first novel, Meet Me Under The Ombu Tree, on the experience and if it weren't for going there I probably would never have become a writer.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd break into Harrods and help myself to all the shoes and clothes that took my eye.

The song that means most to you... I love Ennio Morricone's score to the film Cinema Paradiso. I wrote my second novel to it on a loop and I play it whenever I'm writing about Italy.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... The day would start with breakfast at The Carlyle hotel in New York. I'd have pancakes with maple syrup and a decaf latte, then go shopping with girlfriends. Then I'd go to Argentina where they'd finally be making the movie of Meet Me Under The Ombu Tree, which has been in development for years. I'll be cast as the lead character Sofia and the gorgeous Javier Bardem would be my lover Santi! We'd have Argentine steak for lunch with wine and Javier would be mad for me, but I'd fight him off. Later I'd go horseriding in Montana with Sebag and our children Lily, 16, and Sasha, 14. We'd then check into

the Amangiri hotel in Utah, which is surrounded by extraordinary landscape. Later, I'd meditate with the Dalai Lama. In the evening we'd have chicken curry in Rajasthan at the Dev Shree hotel, which is owned by some dear friends. We'd end the day at Klosters, Switzerland, with extended family and friends doing a torch-lit ski from the top of the mountain at midnight.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Driving across the Arizona desert on our family holiday this summer was so exciting and magical.

The saddest time that shook your world... Tara's death was so shocking it hit me like a train. I find it impossible to comprehend that I won't see her again.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To play the piano properly. I can play chords and read music, but I only muddle through.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Everything happens for a reason. Even a bad experience is OK, if you learn from it and become wiser.

The order of service at your funeral... I don't want a classic funeral, I want my family to say some prayers and read poems to help get me where I'm going.

The way you want to be remembered... As a loving mother and wife and a storyteller who entertained and touched people.

The Plug... The Last Secret Of The Deverills by Santa Montefiore is published by Simon & Schuster, £14.99. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Michael Fassbender plays cat and mouse with a serial killer in *The Snowman* – in cinemas Friday. Pink's new album *Beautiful Trauma* is out the same day. And Lesley Sharp opens in *The Seagull* at London's Lyric Hammersmith theatre on Wednesday



NEXT WEEK

- Shepherd's Pie, Duck And Watermelon Salad – part two of our recipe series from celebrity haunt The Ivy
- Monty Don on how to create your dream garden
- Britain's best TV listings