

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's *Grand Designs*' Kevin McCloud



'If I could get away with any crime, I'd dig up St James's Park and turn it into allotments'

The prized possession you value above all others... A 2in-high model of a Roman wall which I made from cork in 2009 under the tuition of a master modeller in Rome. It's like a little piece of art.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not working out what I wanted to do in life until I was 35. I'm 54 now.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Book Of Common Prayer. I was brought up as a Methodist and I sang in the choir at Cambridge University, so I'm deeply connected to the text.

The person who has influenced you most... My father Donald. He was a scientist and was always making or repairing things. There was never any question of hiring someone to fix the car or do up the house – we did it all. Dad gave me an instinct to find out how things work, which underscores everything in my life.

Left: Frank Sinatra. Above right: Haribo sweets. Far right: the Isle of Skye

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I would ride a vintage Triumph motorbike recklessly around London.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Laziness. I spent much of my life being lazy, but now I'm so itchy to do things that I don't like to see it in others.

The film you can watch time and time again... Trading Places. Dan Aykroyd and Eddie Murphy are so good together. I love its unadulterated silliness.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Haribo sweets. Once I start on a packet it's hard to stop.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Benjamin Franklin. He came from modest beginnings to become one of the Founding Fathers of America. I'd love to know what he makes of the world today.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... There are bits of you that have to grow up. But not *all* of you.

The song that means most to you... Nice 'n' Easy by Frank Sinatra. It's about falling in love, and his voice gives such meaning to the words.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Planting trees is my big hobby. I've planted hundreds around



my home. I love the story of a tree's life cycle.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... An old macintosh I'd had for about 15 years and left on a train platform a couple of years ago. I've tried to buy the same one but it's no longer made.

The poem that touches your soul... I love the works of John Hegley, but it's impossible to choose just one poem. They all have a sharp truth in their humour. Like me, he grew up in Luton, so I see him as a fellow traveller.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... Four-fifths of people I meet say, 'I didn't think you'd be so tall' and the other fifth say, 'I thought you'd be taller!' To avoid further confusion, I'm 6ft 2½in.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Passing my 11-plus got me into a very good grammar school with teachers who expected more from me than I thought possible, and set off a chain of events that led me to study at Cambridge.

The unending quest that drives you on... I want to go to the grave knowing my housing company has helped build high-quality, sustainable homes that people enjoy living in.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd dig up St James's Park in London and turn it into allotments.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd meet a bunch of mountaineering soulmates at the foot of Mont Blanc in France at dawn. We'd cross-country ski, climb to a glacier, marvel at the views, then ski down – to Rome! Here, I'd be joined by my wife Zani and our children [Elsie, 12, Milo, 16, Grace, 22 and Hugo, 26; the elder two are from a different relationship]. We'd visit the Ara Pacis monument, and have lots of pasta at a small trattoria. I'd also have a delicious Roman stew and lemon tart with some good Italian red wine. We'd travel to the Isle of Skye to stay at a friend's house and watch whales breach. I'd spend time talking to the makers of

Harris Tweed, which is a passion of mine, then I'd be joined by a club of fellow whisky lovers to drink the night away with Talisker single malt, while watching the Northern Lights.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The year I spent working in a Tuscan vineyard when I was 18. I saw the whole cycle of the making of wine.

The saddest time that shook your world... My father's death in 2003, aged 73. He was a brilliant, cerebral man, but also the kindest, gentlest person I've ever known. I still miss him.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To own a hilltop vineyard in Italy and spend my days tending the vines. I could still do it in my 80s.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Now you're here, get on with it.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd prefer for the service to be one of total disorder! I'll be dead so I wouldn't care if they threw my body in a ditch. I'll leave money for a wake, to make up for my curmudgeonly side that's kept me away from so many parties. I'd be happy for my ashes to be scattered on the hills of Dovedale in Derbyshire.

The way you want to be remembered... Just to be remembered would be nice, but we're all little specks of dust, so it's highly unlikely...

The Plug... Kevin McCloud will be at Grand Designs Live, 3-11 May, London ExCel. Tickets: call 0844 854 1348 or visit www.granddesignslive.com. ■

As told Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID MCGHUGH/REX, ALAMY, ISTOCK

PS...

The Amazing Spider-Man 2, starring Andrew Garfield, swings into cinemas on Friday. Antony Sher is Falstaff in the RSC's Henry IV Parts I & II, from Wednesday in Stratford-upon-Avon. And Paolo Nutini's new album Caustic Love is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Shaun Evans takes us behind the scenes on Endeavour
- The perfect roast lamb for Easter – and three exotic variations – from Jamie Oliver
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings