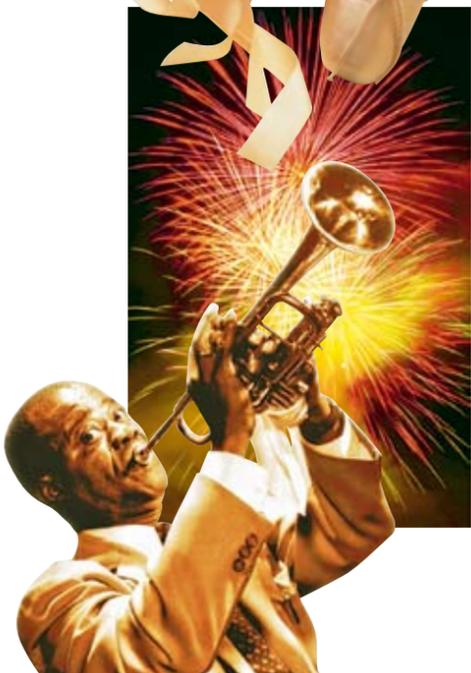




From top: The Seychelles, Spy Game with Robert Redford and Brad Pitt, Meryl Streep, food shopping, ballet shoes, fireworks and Louis Armstrong



The prized possession you value above all others... The Aga in our home in Dorset [Hermione also has a house in London]. It cost £10,000 to put in ten years ago, but was worth every penny. It's the heart of the home – it makes amazing roasts, dries clothes and I even sit the kids on it to warm them up!

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I wish I'd had my children younger. I was 37 when I had Wilf [now eight] and 40 when I had my daughter Hero [now four]. I'm 45 now and it'd be nice to have more stamina – being a mum can be shattering.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...

I'd watch the sun come up alone at Shimla in the Himalayas, then have breakfast with a girlfriend at Tom's Deli in Notting Hill – I love the eggs Benedict there. After skiing in Val d'Isère with my husband Simon, I'd relax with all the family on North Island in the Seychelles – a stunning private desert island with villas. I'd have a massage and read a novel on the beach, then go horse riding in Patagonia before heading to New York to watch Ruthie Henshall in Chicago on Broadway. I'd end the day having dinner with Simon at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons near Oxford, then head home to London.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Buying for a family of ten when I'm in Waitrose! I'll happily spend an hour there and rack up a bill of £300.

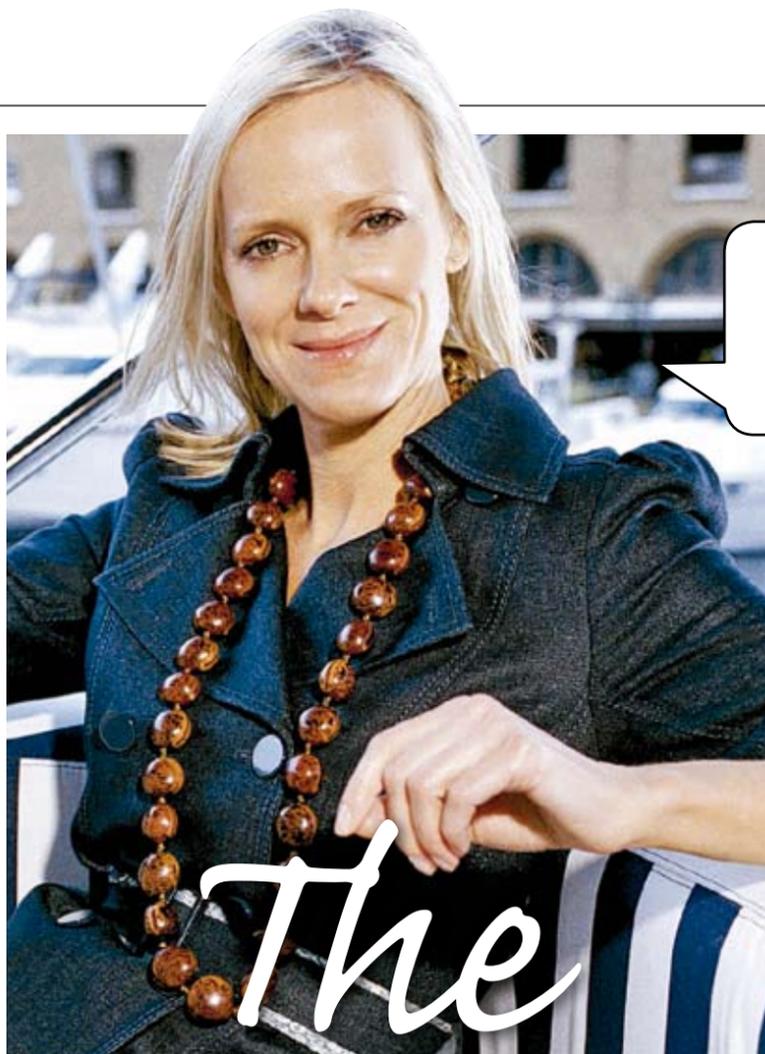
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Pat Barker's Regeneration Trilogy [Regeneration, The Eye In The Door and The Ghost Road] opened up the First World War to me. The scale of the loss of life is deeply moving.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd shadow Meryl Streep at work. She's an incredible actress with the lightest of touches.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... The culture of fear we live in because it stifles creativity. People should have the freedom to fail because that's what drives inspiration.

The film you can watch time and time again... Spy Game with Robert Redford and Brad Pitt. It's beautiful – essentially it's a love story between two men.

The person who has influenced you most... My drama teacher Colin Cook at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. He gets your blood up and makes you passionate about acting.



'I'd love to put on a black catsuit and pull off a really complex jewellery robbery!'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's actress Hermione Norris's turn

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Nell Gwyn was the first commercially successful actress. I'd love to chat to her about her world and ask her about her boyfriend, Charles II.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Be comfortable with yourself and embrace who you are, because you're going to be in your company for the rest of your life. Be your own best friend.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I love bad cookery programmes. The Barefoot Contessa with Ina Garten is appalling, but watching her is strangely comforting.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A beautiful platinum butterfly necklace with blue sapphire wings. Simon gave it to me but I lost it about five years ago at work and still feel bad about it. It was quite rare and he was genuinely upset.

The unending quest that drives you on... To do a beautiful piece of work.

The poem that touches your soul... The Desiderata [written by American Max Ehrmann in 1927]. It's like a little manual on how to live your life.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People think I'm very put-together, refined and tidy, but I'm actually very scruffy and messy and not at all put-together!

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting a scholarship to ballet school when I was 11. My dream was to be Margot Fonteyn, but ballet led me into acting.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd love to put on a black catsuit and pull off a really complex jewellery robbery.

The song that means most to you... Louis Armstrong's What A Wonderful World. It was on the radio at the exact moment my son was born.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Obviously, when my children were born, but also getting into LAMDA at 18. I was working in Liberty when I found out and said, 'Oh God, YES!'

The saddest time that shook your world... My father dying when I was 21. It broke me, but it also made me grow up and decide what I wanted to do with my life.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To give my children a solid foundation to their lives.

The philosophy that underpins your life... *Carpe diem.*

The order of service at your funeral... I'd be burnt on a pyre at Varanasi in India and have my ashes scattered on the Ganges. Then an orchestra would play Giovanni Pergolesi's Stabat Mater in F minor at a huge party in my garden in Dorset, followed by fantastic fireworks!

The way you want to be remembered... As a person who left lots of love behind.

The Plug... I'm a patron of Maggie's Centres. They offer extraordinary care to people with cancer. Please support them at www.maggiescentres.org. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Keira Knightley stars in bittersweet comedy Seeking A Friend

For The End Of The World – in cinemas now. Roger Lloyd-Pack

is one of the all-male cast for Richard III at Shakespeare's Globe

in London. And Madonna plays at Hyde Park on Tuesday



NEXT WEEK

- Behind the scenes on topical Olympics sitcom Twenty Twelve ●
- At home with Ann Widdecombe
- Authentic Spanish tapas made easy ● Jamie Oliver rustles up three novel brunches ● PLUS
- Don't miss Britain's best TV listings