

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's chef Heston Blumenthal's turn



'I'm obsessed with table tennis. It's like meditating – you can't think of anything but hitting that flipping ball'

The prized possession you value above all others... My OBE. I received it from the Queen in January 2006 for services to British gastronomy. It was unforgettable – one of my proudest moments.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... I believe regret's a futile emotion because it's carrying the past into the future. That said, I do regret blowing up the oven the day after I opened The Fat Duck [his three-Michelin-starred restaurant in Berkshire] in 1995.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Picking at food. I love to see how many flavours I can discover.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... On Food And Cooking: The Sci-

ence And Lore Of The Kitchen by Harold McGee. I read it in 1986 when I was 20 and it affected me deeply. He wrote about the chemistry of food and challenged the accepted wisdom of how to cook.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Lewis Carroll. I'd love to ask what was really in his head when he was writing Alice's Adventures In Wonderland.

The priority activity if you were the invisible Man for a day... I'd go to one of my restaurants and freak out the chefs with daft pranks during service.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... I hate it when people are impolite and when someone takes the kudos for someone else's work.

The film you can watch time and time again... Zulu with Michael Caine. I love how the soldiers fought against such odds. My dad bought a video recorder when I was ten and it was the first film we taped. I watched it 24 times!

The person who has influenced you most... Harold McGee. His writing reassured me that it was OK to challenge everything.

The piece of wisdom you'd pass on to a child... Blame, shame, guilt



and fear are tied to the past. They're not worth spending energy on.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... It may surprise people that I meditate. I'm all over the place because I'm so busy, but I've learnt to take time to be mindful.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My right hip! It had been damaged by osteoporosis and I had it replaced last year.

The unending quest that drives you on... To find answers to all my questions. I am endlessly inquisitive.

The poem that touches your soul... William Blake's Jerusalem. The words carry a powerful metaphor about life. My eyes always mist up when I hear it.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm an über-smart scientist! My only A-level is in art. I just find knowledge wondrous and I'm enthusiastic and determined.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... My first fine-dining experience at 16. My parents took me and my sister to France and we

had dinner at L'Oustau de Baumaniere. The world of gastronomy was revealed and I knew I was going to be a chef.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... Speeding.

The song that means most to you... Father And Son by Cat Stevens. It reminds me of my dad, who died in 2011, and of my son, Jack, who's 22.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... My day would begin at sunrise with my girlfriend Suzanne on Signal Hill in Cape Town, then I'd meditate on a beach. After that I'd visit Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo, where I'd buy fish for a sushi breakfast. I'd spend the morning skiing with my kids [Jack, Jessie, 21, and Joy, 17] in Zermatt, Switzerland, then we'd ski in Courmayeur in Italy where we'd have lunch at Maison Vieille. I'd have white truffle spaghetti with Italian red wine. Afterwards I'd play table tennis with an instructor. I'm obsessed with it – it's a bit like meditating because you can't think of anything else except hitting that flipping little white ball! Later I'd visit the Museum of Old and New

Art (MONA) in Tasmania then go to San Sebastián for dinner with some chef mates. I'd end the day at midnight somewhere remote with the family watching the Northern Lights while cooking burgers on an open fire.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Personally, it's the births of my children and, professionally, the day I got my third Michelin Star for The Fat Duck in 2004.

The saddest time that shook your world... The day in 2012 when two of my kitchen team died [a taxi carrying Ivan Aranto Herrera Jorge, 34, and Magnus Lindgren, 30, was hit by a bus in Hong Kong]. It's made me understand what really matters in life.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To attain perfection in my work.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Question everything. I had a coat of arms made last year and that's even the motto on my heraldry.

The order of service at your funeral... I just want there to be a lot of laughter and celebration. I know I've been really lucky, so I'll have had no regrets.

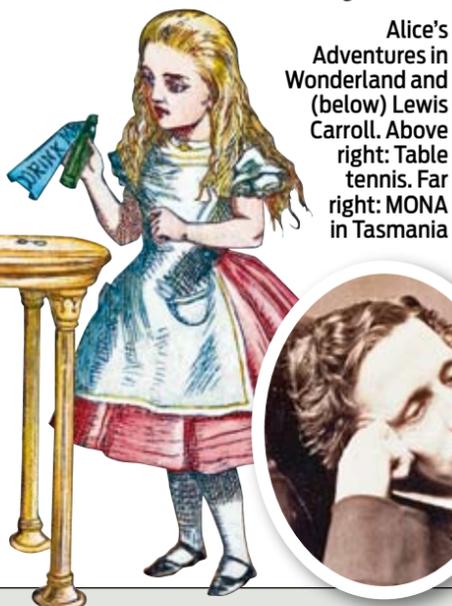
The way you want to be remembered... As someone who lived in the moment, questioned everything and had fun.

The Plug... Historic Heston, a 21st-century take on British recipes from medieval times to the Victorian era is £40, bloomsbury.com/uk. Visit thefatduck.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: NEALE HAYNES/CONTOUR; CORBIS/JOHN TENNIEL; GETTY IMAGES/LEIGH CARMICHAEL; ALLSTAR



Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and (below) Lewis Carroll. Above right: Table tennis. Far right: MONA in Tasmania



PS...

Gwyneth Paltrow and Johnny Depp star in comedy *Mortdecai*, in cinemas from Friday. The RSC's *Oppenheimer* tells the story of 'the father of the atomic bomb' at the Swan Theatre in Stratford. And Mark Ronson's latest album *Uptown Special* is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

● We launch a fabulous new competition for budding artists, with step-by-step help from the experts ● Matthew Gravelle takes us behind the scenes on Broadchurch ● PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide