

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

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

The prized possession you value above all others... My home in south-west London. I moved in eight years ago and I call it Il Castelluccio – The Little Castle. My garden is full of fruit. I have prunes, pears, quinces and plums.

The film you can watch time and time again... Il Postino [The Postman] is the most beautiful and touching film. It takes me back to happy times in my childhood in northern Italy when my father was a railway stationmaster.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... The great actor Peter Ustinov. I met him briefly at a party in the 90s and he was such an interesting, intelligent man with a great sense of humour. I'd love to go back to the 50s when he was playing Nero in Quo Vadis [released in 1951]. I loved him in that film.

Peter Ustinov in Quo Vadis. Above right: mushrooms. Far right: A turtle

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... That I no longer have any communication with my ex-wife Priscilla and her children. They were such a happy part of my life for so long, but something has happened and I cannot explain what.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Asking so many questions about everything.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd follow a traffic warden around and cause chaos as he gives out tickets.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Ignorant people.

The person who has influenced you most... My mother, Maria. She was always ready to defend her six children, and mother taught me a lot about cooking. She died 20 years ago and there are only three of us children left.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy. I love the fantasy and losing myself in the stories.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Think big and if things don't go as you plan, just try again.

The philosophy that underpins your life... MOF MOF: Minimum of Fuss, Maximum of Flavour.



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...

Whittling wood to make walking sticks. I started when I was a boy and I now have about 300. I'm even a member of the British Stickmakers Guild. I find it relaxing.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...

A bronze statue of a girl holding lilies. She was stolen during a house move about 40 years ago and I miss her.

The unending quest that drives you on... I wish I could cook Chinese food but even though my friend Ken Hom has taught me a bit I still can't do it.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm grumpy. My face is not entirely sympathetic and some people think I look like a Mafioso! But I'm jolly and gentle.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... The death of my little brother Enrico when he was 13 and I was 23. He drowned in a lake. I don't think I've ever got over it. It made me question the Catholic Church and the existence of God.



'Everyone assumes I'm grumpy. My face isn't entirely sympathetic and some people think I look like a Mafioso'

salty sea water. After lunch I'd relax in a hammock with a Havana cigar, then have a nap. Then I'd go to a fishing village by the Black Sea and eat a kilo of Beluga caviar. Sabine and I would watch the sun go down on safari in Africa, then arrive at a tranquil lake in Kerala, India, for a spicy dinner. I'd end the day with a malt whisky.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The day in 2009 when I awoke from depression. I'd tried to kill myself [Antonio stabbed himself in 2008], but after going into The Priory hospital I slowly got better.

The saddest time that shook your world... Enrico's death. That awful moment I saw him in the mortuary is an image that will never leave my mind.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To organise all the photos from my life. They're all over the place in boxes and drawers.

The order of service at your funeral... I want my body laid on a bed of sliced truffles then carried into the crematorium by six beautiful women. I then want a party in the foothills of Mont Blanc in Italy, where my ashes will be put into a firework which will explode and scatter me across the countryside.

The way you want to be remembered... As a jolly fellow who was good to people and enjoyed simple things.

The Plug... Antonio's new book, Pasta, is published by Quadrille, priced £20. Visit www.antonio-carluccio.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Sherlock's Martin Freeman returns to the stage in Richard III at London's Trafalgar Studios. If you haven't seen it before, catch the reissued Beatles comedy A Hard Day's Night – in cinemas from Friday. And David Gray's new album Mutineers is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Six pages of sensational salads to kick off our brilliant summer series
- Katie Derham invites us backstage at the Proms
- Monty Don on how to beat the aphid invasion
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings