The prized possession you value above all others... The gold St Christopher my father Jean gave me when I was nine for my first communion. I never take it off. The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... Smoking. I started when I was 16 and was smoking 40 Gitanes a day when I gave up in 2001. I feel ashamed by it. I only gave up when I asked my daughter Christina what she wanted for Christmas and she said, ‘For you to stop smoking.’ I stopped the next day.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... My professional life is a bombardment of noise and stress, so I’d drive to the mountains of Austria with my fiancée Michelle and our three-year-old son Jean-Frank. We’d have a packed lunch of sandwiches and ride bikes and walk. I’d also go to Cumbria to swim in the lakes. That water makes you feel alive. The temptation you wish you could resist... Strong black coffee with no sugar. I have six to eight cups a day and I’m told it’s bad for me, but any day that starts without coffee is ruined!

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... On Food And Cooking: The Science And Lore Of The Kitchen, by Harold McGee, has the core knowledge anyone needs to enjoy cooking. The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... To have been in the changing room at Old Trafford after Man Utd were beaten 6-1 by Man City in October to see how Alex Ferguson really coped with that defeat! The life of another with whom you would gladly trade places... Dutch footballer Johan Cruyff. I was a good striker when I was younger and I dreamed of being him. The film you can watch time and time again... I’ve hardly seen any films as I’ve always worked so hard. But the TV series Columbo helps me switch off. The person who has influenced you most... My mother Monique. She’s 76 now, but had polio when she was four and has been disabled all her life. She’s never complained or shown any weakness, and she’s also an amazing cook, who inspired my love for food. The figure from history for whom you’d most like to buy a pie and a pint... Georges-Jacques Danton, who was one of the architects of the French Revolution. What an achievement! I’d ask him how he made it happen.

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions — and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it’s TV chef Jean-Christophe Novelli

The philosophy that underpins your life... The Plug... Jean-Christophe will be at Taste Of Christmas in partnership with AEG at London’s ExCel from 2-4 December. Visit www.tasteofchristmas.com. Details of his cookery school are at www.jeanchristophenovelli.com.

As told to Rob McGibbon

My father used to punish me by making me do multiplication — but I ended up loving maths.