From top: The Third Man, Walter The Farting Dog, an Oscar, Queen Boudicca, the Taj Mahal, Dean Martin and Winnie-the-Pooh

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's bon viveur Michael Winner

The prized possession you value above all others... My collection of children's book illustrations, including original drawings of Winnie-the-Pooh by Ernest Shephard. It is worth about £2 million, but the money is unimportant. The pictures give me great pleasure.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I didn't give my parents enough attention because I was obsessed with being a jack-the-lad film director. I feel utterly ashamed.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I hate airports, so I would need a private jet to fly my fiancée Geraldine [whom Michael is due to marry on Monday] and I to two countries I have never visited – India and China. A helicopter would whizz us to the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall and the Forbidden City, and I would lap up the different cultures.

The temptation you wish you could resist... I wish my brain said 'No' when confronted with a chocolate éclair, rather than 'As many as possible'.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Walter The Farting Dog. It is about a dog that paralyses some burglars with his farts. I am very childish – it is my *only* quality!

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd go to Downing Street to observe the so-called great and good who lead us. We are told they are better than us, but I am certain they are all dumb.

The way fame and fortune has changed you, for better and worse... I have been famous for 50 years, so it is hard to know if I have changed. I can walk down the street without much trouble, although people sometimes shout, 'Calm down, dear!' As for the fortune, I am £9 million in debt!

The film you can watch time and time again... The Third Man with Orson Welles is a perfect example of film-making. I have seen it 36 times.

The person who has influenced you most... A schoolmistress called Miss Hobbs who ran a crammer college in London. I left school at 16 with a terrible education, but in one year Miss Hobbs got me into Cambridge to study Law and Economics. She gave me an inner peace that changed my life.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Queen Boudicca. I like people who know what they want and fight for it.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... The race in life is not for the fleet of foot, it is for the plodder.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I enjoy polishing furniture and hand-washing my silk shirts. You get an immediate result.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My youth. I did well by normal standards, but I didn't spend it wisely. Losing your youth is highly unfortunate!

The unending quest that drives you on... To remain part of the scene. I am 75, but I work a full day to stay sharp.

The poem that touches your soul... Oscar Wilde's The Ballad Of Reading Gaol. He suffered so dreadfully.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People expect me to enter restaurants screaming and shouting, but I am actually a very shy, decent human being who comes in quietly, eats, thanks everyone, then leaves. I am largely to blame for creating this comedy monster.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Going to Cambridge. I never thought I was worthy of it, but the people I met there inspired me to be myself.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I would fix the Lottery. I am richer than most, but I need more money to fund my lifestyle.

The song that means most to you... That's Amore by Dean Martin. The Fifties was my favourite era.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When Marlon Brando called me in LA in 1970 and invited me to his house to discuss the film The Nightcomers. It marked the beginning of a wonderful 30-year friendship.

The saddest time that shook your world... When my mother died in 1984 aged 78. We had fallen out because she gambled away £100 million of my inheritance. We had not spoken for four months, but I was prepared to have a reconciliation. I delayed it, then she died. It upsets me to this day.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I wish I had won an Oscar. It is most unlikely now, but miracles can happen.

The philosophy that underpins your life... When you leave a room, ensure the people you were with are happier than they were before you went in.

The order of service at your funeral... I don't want a funeral, but I'd like to be buried on a patch of grass near the National Police Memorial at Cambridge Green in London. I am the chairman and founder of the Police Memorial Trust charity, but it is against the law to be buried there, so I'd need some friends to secretly dig a hole at 4am and throw in my body.

The way you want to be remembered... As someone who contributed some degree of happiness to the nation.

The Plug... My latest memoir, Tales I Never Told, is published by The Robson Press on 20 October, priced £16.

As told to Rob McGibbon

PHOTOGRAPHS:XXXX