We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it’s chef and television presenter Rick Stein

The prized possession you value above all others... My waterproof Sony MP3 headphones I use while swimming, which I do most days at a pool near my home in west London or in the sea in Cornwall. I listen to music or podcasts like Desert Island Discs.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not going to Miami with my wife Sas [Sarah] and my stepkids – Zach, 19, and Olivia, 17 – last year because I was writing a book. They went to Joe’s Stone Crab restaurant, which I’ve wanted to go to for years.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Leopard by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, set in 19th-century Sicily. It’s so stylish and evocative – I find new riches each time I read it.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I’d wander around my restaurants and listen to what people are really saying about the food.

The person who has influenced you most... Elizabeth David, the cookery writer from the 1950s and 60s. Her books about France and Italy made me want to cook.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Marshmallows! I have an aversion to them because of all that gelatin and their texture. They’re gross.

The film you can watch time and again... Withnail And I. Richard E Grant is superb in it and I adore his manic behaviour.

The song that means the world to you... To Run by Bruce Springsteen. It takes me back to my teenage years when I had a sense of freedom.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Be kind – it’s important to think of others.

The order of service at your funeral... I’d better get started.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To paint. I love art and I think I have the right brain to do it, but I’ve never learnt. I’m 69, so I’d better get started.

The event that altered the course of your life... Meeting my first wife, Jill. I’d have Leop de Mer poché – that poached sea bass – and mouseline sauce with Meursault wine, followed by fraises du bois [wild strawberries]. Later, I’d go for a walk at Cape Kidnappers in Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand, to see the bird colony. I’d then go for a winter’s swim in the Secret Lagoon, Iceland. I went there once and it was -10°C outside, but 40°C in the water. After that I’d go to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid, which has the most fabulous art collection. I’d have lunch at La Colombe d’Or in Saint-Paul de Venice, South of France, with all the family, including my sons Ed, 37, Jack, 35, and Charles, 31 [children with his first wife, Jill]. I’d have Leop de Mer poché...

The treasure item you lost and wish you could have again... Perfect vision in my right eye. I picked up a weird virus when I was 16 and it left me very short-sighted in that eye. That’s why I’m extrovert because I do TV. I’m actually really introverted and shy and find it hard to talk to people at parties.

The unending quest that drives you... To find the perfect restaurant with absolutely no faults.

The unspoken craving you could never satisfy... I wish I could erase the misapprehension about myself that the person who has influ... the unfulfilled ambition that contin...