

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's the turn of actress Siân Phillips



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**The prized possession you value above all others...** A quick charcoal sketch of my late Burmese cat Barnaby by the artist Stephen B. Whatley. He was painting my portrait at home and when I left the room he drew Barnaby. I love it.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Not asking my mother, Sally, about her life. I only know the bare bones of her story and would give anything to know more. She died in 1985 from lung cancer when she was 85.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Saying 'Yes' to challenging projects. I can't stop myself, but I put myself under so much pressure. I'm 81, so I should know better.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** The Goshawk by TH White. It's his own story about training a goshawk while he was living in the country and having a breakdown. It's about a man right on the edge.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day...** I'd shadow Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England. I find his breezy Canadian charm intriguing.

Right: A Samurai warrior. Above right: The Lottery. Far right: The Black Mountains

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Loud voices in public, particularly from girls. They're not taught to cultivate the lower register as we were 50 years ago.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** The 1954 Japanese film Seven Samurai. It's a wonderful adventure story about a group of Samurai trying to defend a village from bandits.

**The person who has influenced you most...** My mother for her work ethic and strength.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Sydney Smith, who was an English cleric and writer in the 18th century. He was one of the great wits of his time.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Get to know yourself.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** The Samurai fascinate me – I buy books to immerse myself in their fighting techniques, weaponry and rituals. They devoted their lives to an immense code – I find them so exciting.



**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** A Louis XIV desk I bought in the early 60s for £700, which was a lot

of money then. I took nothing with me when I left Peter [ex-husband, actor Peter O'Toole] in 1976. After that, the desk just got lost in the mix.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd fix the Lottery, so I could help people I care about – and keep plenty for myself!

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To deliver a performance that turns out *exactly* as I meant it to.

**The poem that touches your soul...** The Prelude by Wordsworth. It's about being alone in the countryside and I identified with it because I grew up as an only child in a remote part of Wales.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm Sheila Hancock! I've known Sheila for 50 years and it's happened many times. We laugh about it.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Getting into RADA in 1955 when I was 22. I'd always wanted to be an actress.

**The song that means most to you...** I love old Welsh songs about homesickness. They're full of melancholy.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I'd wake up in Connemara in Ireland and have a full Irish breakfast – black pudding, fried eggs, soda bread – followed by tea. Then I'd go for a walk in the rain by the Fan Lakes in the Black Mountains in Wales. I'd join a friend of mine in Venice for lunch at Trattoria alla Madonna, where I'd have squid in black ink with polenta. I'd spend the afternoon in London and have the best seats at a matinee at the Royal Opera



## PS...

Liam Neeson plays an ageing hitman in *Run All Night*, in cinemas Friday. John Ford's tragedy *The Broken Heart* is at Shakespeare's Globe theatre from Thursday. And *Rebel Heart*, the new album from Madonna, is out on Monday



## NEXT WEEK

- Chef Tom Kerridge joins Weekend magazine
- Trevor McDonald meets the Mafia
- Monty Don's essential spring guide to sowing seeds
- PLUS Britain's biggest and most detailed TV listings guide