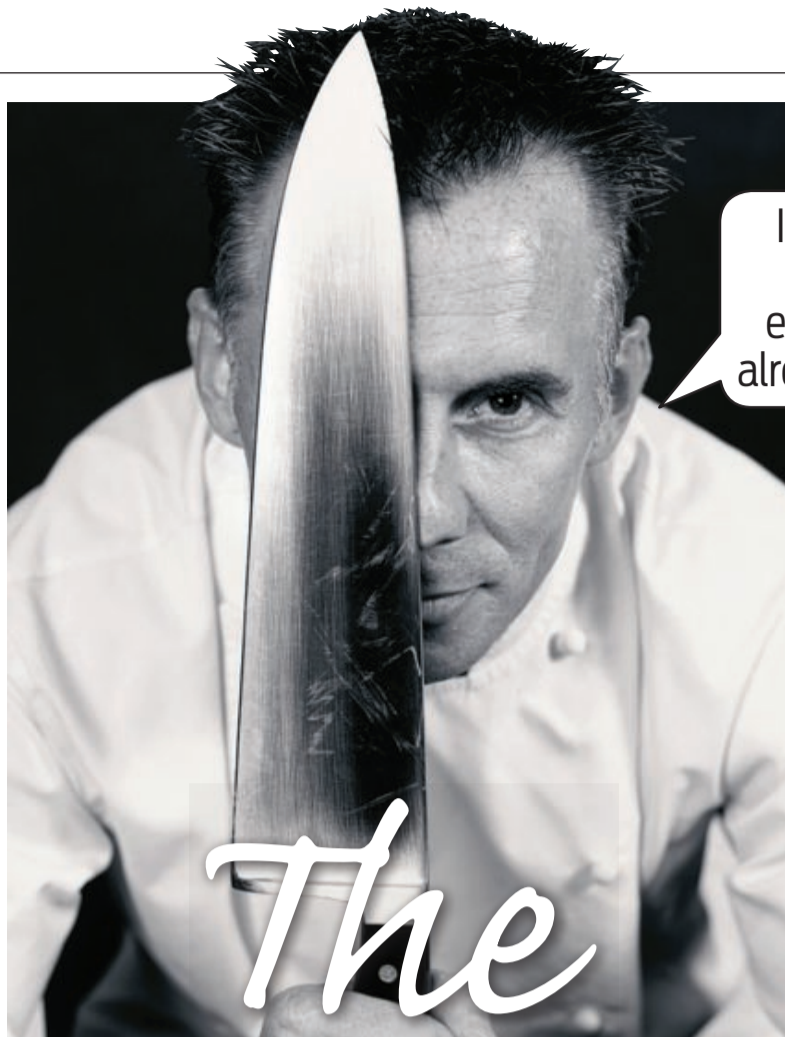




I'm so fanatical about ironing that I press everything – even if it's already been dry-cleaned!



The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept *THE* definitive answer. This week it's chef Gary Rhodes

The prized possession you value above all others... My OBE, which I received for services to the hospitality industry in 2006. I never thought I'd be recognised in such a memorable way.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... Selling my dream 'supercar' ten years ago, because I joined Damon Hill's supercar rental club P1. The car was a Lotus Esprit S4s, a one-off test car. It became a family member and I'd buy it back tomorrow if I could.

The poem that touches your soul... It's not a poem, but this quote from the 18th-century gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin inspires me: 'The discovery of a new dish confers more happiness on humanity than the discovery of a new star.'

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm a 'spiky-haired cheeky chappie'. It implies that I'm a clown and a two-bit cook. I've been in the industry for 35 years and

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A bespoke Giorgio Armani suit that cost £2,000 in 2006. I pressed the trousers one day in a mad rush, and burnt a hole in them. My favourite suit was lost for ever.

The unending quest that drives you on... To achieve consistency and excellence in all aspects of my life.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...

Breakfast in Grenada in the Caribbean with my wife Jennie and our boys, Samuel and George. Lunch on a yacht off the South of France, entertaining friends and family with great food and wine, being serenaded by Stevie Wonder. The evening at Old Trafford as Manchester United pull off a stunning victory.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Clothes. I've become quite obsessed with shirts and trousers and I have about 60 suits.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Down And Out In Paris And London by George Orwell. It describes the pressures of busy kitchens brilliantly. I read it when I was 14 in 1974 and it made me decide to become a chef.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd jump every queue. I hate queuing, particularly for train tickets – why do people need to know the whole timetable?!

The way fame and fortune has changed you, for better and worse... I don't believe I've changed that much. But I've learnt that life changes for the better if you're disciplined and dedicated.

The film you can watch time and time again... The action film Man On Fire with Denzel Washington. It always has me on the edge of my seat.

The person who has influenced you most... Peter Barrett, a tutor at my first catering college in Kent in 1976. He taught me how to respect your team. He's a close friend and still inspires me.

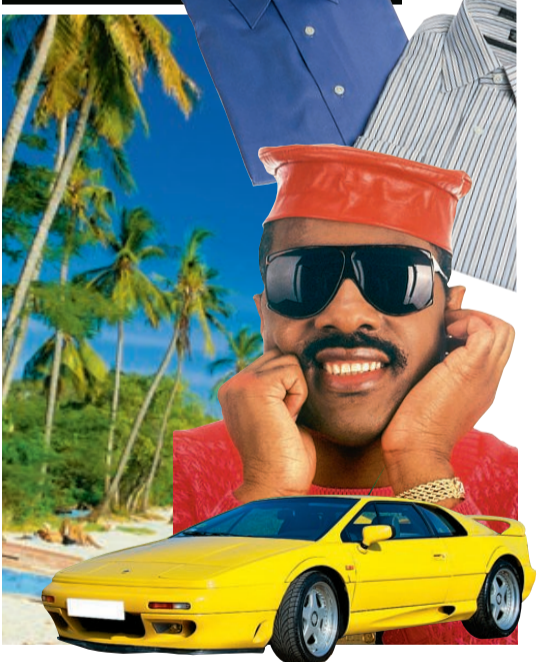
The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Martin Luther King. He changed history with his 'I have a dream' speech. I'd be honoured to cook for him and hear what he thinks about today's world.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Good manners will never let you down.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Ironing. I'm so fanatical I iron everything – even if it has already been dry-cleaned!



Gary loves (from top) lunch on a yacht with great wine, Martin Luther King, Man on Fire, Down and Out in Paris and London, ironing, Grenada, Stevie Wonder and a Lotus



have received six Michelin stars, yet that is often forgotten!

The event that altered the course of your life and character... I was knocked down by a van in Amsterdam at 19, while I was the chef at the Hilton. I was running for a tram and looked the wrong way while crossing a road. I had a blood clot in my head and needed eight hours of brain surgery and six months to recover. I've always looked both ways ever since.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd 'borrow' all three of Alain Ducasse's three-Michelin-Star restaurants – a crime that would achieve all my dreams in one go!

The song that means most to you... Free by Stevie Wonder, which seems to say that the greatest gift in life – and beyond – is freedom. I listen to it all the time.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Aside from my marriage and the births of my sons, it was Manchester United winning the European Cup Final in 1999 and with it the treble.

The saddest time that shook your world... On New Year's Eve 2003, my friend David Nicholls came over and collapsed in tears. His 19-year-old son Dan had broken his neck, by hitting a sandback while diving into a wave on Bondi Beach, and was paralysed from the arms down.

Dan's a vibrant young man and I hope he'll make a full recovery one day.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I still dream of achieving 'Two Michelin Star' culinary status. This keeps my mind and spirit alive.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Respect can only be earned, not demanded.

The order of service at your funeral... Whatever makes the congregation suitably happy and sad. I want to be cremated – making sure I'm well seasoned and cooked to perfection.

The way you want to be remembered... As someone who could really cook.

The Plug... The Nicholls Spinal Injury Foundation www.nichollsfoundation.org.uk. Visit www.garyrhodes.com.

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Catch final previews of *Shrek The Musical* before it opens next week at the Theatre Royal. *The Arctic Monkeys'* fourth album, *Suck It And See*, is out on Monday. And Keira Knightley's new film, *Last Night*, is out on Friday



NEXT WEEK

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