The prized possession you value above all others… My dog Nellie, a Korthals Griffon – given to me as a birthday present ten years ago by my wife Jennie – is a source of daily joy. Never critical, always good-humoured. A treasure.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend… I left school at 16 and skipped university to work, initially as a waiter. I think I missed out on what would have been great years.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions… I no longer have any desire for long-distance travel. I prefer to stay in my home at Lourmarin, Provence. A perfect day here would include breakfast in the sunshine, a walk in the Luberon Regional Park, an extended session in the pool, and a long lunch with friends at the Auberge de la Môle restaurant near St Tropez. Not very exotic, I’m afraid, but very pleasant.

The temptation you wish you could resist… I would dearly love to resist the temptation, if you can call it that, to worry. It’s boring, it’s anti-social, it’s unproductive and it’s depressing. The book that holds an everlasting resonance… The Elements Of Style, by William Strunk and EB White. It was first published in 1918 and remains a concise reminder of how to write. My copy was given to me more than 40 years ago by my old boss, David Ogilvy. [Maye worked for the advertising guru in New York for 15 years.]

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day… I’d visit the kitchen of the Elysée Palace when the cooks are preparing a banquet for a particularly unpopular head of state. Could they resist putting something disgusting in his soup?

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise… Meanness, social or financial. The film you can watch time and time again… Lawrence Of Arabia, because of David Lean’s direction and Peter O’Toole’s performance.

The person who has influenced you most… David Ogilvy, because of his.Firmly closed for some time.

The figure from history for whom you’d most like to buy a pie and a pint… I’d like to arrange for myself, Napoleon and Margaret Thatcher to get together. Listening to them re-writing history would be absolutely fascinating.

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it’s the turn of author Peter Mayle

The unending quest that drives you on… Fear of poverty. What also keeps me going is the hope that the next book I write will be better than the last.

The poem that touches your soul… When I was at school, my punishment for sniggering in class was to write out William Wordsworth’s I Wandered Alone As A Cloud 200 times. That dampened my enthusiasm for poetry, something which persists to this day. I prefer prose.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase… I can’t think anyone has the time or interest to have misapprehensions about me.

The event that altered the course of your life and character… In the early Sixties, when I was 23, I left England to go work in advertising on Madison Avenue, New York. It was the era of Mad Men and I loved it. At 26 I was earning more than the British Prime Minister. Those years in America made me feel that anything was possible.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it… I’d eliminate George Bush, Tony Blair, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld.

The song that means most to you… These Foolish Things by Bryan Ferry because I love the lyrics and it always reminds me of my wife.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever… There have been so many happy moments, I cherish them all. But I hope the happiest is yet to come. The saddest time that shook your world… The death of close friends is always sad. Recently a neighbour and friend of 40 years died and his going leaves a sad gap in our lives.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you… I’d love to have played cricket for England, but I fear the window of opportunity has been firmly closed for some time.

The philosophy that underpins your life… One must never forget that life is unfair. But sometimes, with a bit of luck, this works in your favour.

The order of service at your funeral… I’ve often thought the best time to die would be after a long lunch – just before the bill arrives! I loathe funerals, and would prefer not to have one. Instead, I’d like to put aside enough in my will for a lavish lunch for a few friends.

The way you want to be remembered… With amusement and affection.

The Plug… Peter’s latest novel, The Marseille Caper, will be published by Alfred A Knopf and Quercus Books in September.

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS…

Go and see The Pirates! In An Adventure With Scientists featuring the voices of Hugh Grant and Salma Hayek – a 3D film from Aardman, the people behind Wallace and Gromit.

And grab Madonna’s new album MDNA, from Monday.