



From top: American politics, Lawrence Of Arabia, cricket, a Korthals Griffon dog, Luberon Regional Park and Napoleon Bonaparte

**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. [Mayle 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 Élysée 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, who cured my sloppy writing habits and taught me about advertising.

**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.



'I worked in advertising on Madison Avenue in the 60s – the Mad Men era. I earned more than the British PM'

# 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 author Peter Mayle*

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** American politics, which are even more grotesque and pretentious than British politics.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** The blind optimism of youth.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Carpe diem – seize the day – and try not to take life seriously. I have a robust sense of humour which helps me deal with problems.

**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 Lonely 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 and 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*



**NEXT WEEK**

● The return of epic TV fantasy saga Game of Thrones ● Jamie Oliver's cracking homemade Easter eggs ● Roast pork is the star of our mouth-watering Easter menu ● PLUS Britain's biggest and best TV listings guide