



From top: Eton College choir, Wallis Simpson, an Old Fashioned cocktail, the Wicked Fairy from Sleeping Beauty, Istanbul, Ziegfeld Follies and Mary Portas

The prized possession you value above all others... A fan letter I received from interior designer Nancy Lancaster – an idol for every decorator – complimenting me on my work. It's framed and I still flush with pride when I see it.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... Not being with the love of my life. I won't name him here, but we were together for 12 years, then he broke it off. That was 20 years ago and I haven't found another true love since.

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

I'd spend all day with the adorable Russian model Natalia Vodianova. We'd have breakfast sailing down the Bosphorus in Istanbul, then head to the mountains of Transylvania for a picnic – we'd travel by hay cart and wear gypsy clothes. Later we'd attend a party in Rome thrown by the fashion designer Valentino, then fly by private jet to my home in Hampshire for Old Fashioned cocktails by the open fire.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Reading late into the night. I promise myself I'll only read for a few minutes, then suddenly it's 2am.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Sybille Bedford is the greatest writer I've ever read. Her first novel, *A Legacy*, is so redolent of the past and has such beautiful language.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd follow a collection of friends and strangers to see what they get up to at night.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Mary Portas. Ugh! She's just awful. That smile, the terrible hair and that commanding voice and arch attitude. She's holier than thou and so pleased with herself, yet talks utter rubbish, and in clichés. I only have to hear her voice and my teeth go on edge.

The film you can watch time and time again... *Ziegfeld Follies* with Fred Astaire and Judy Garland from 1946. I only watch films for the costumes and sets, and this one's extraordinary. I've watched it at least 300 times.

The person who has influenced you most... Lady Diana Cooper, the actress and society beauty, whom I met when I was 16. She taught me how to make life enchanting, rather than a drudge.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor. I met her about eight



'I was a cowboy in Arizona for five years and I got pretty good at lassoing cattle'



The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's interior designer Nicky Haslam

times in New York in the late 1960s. I'd like to know what really happened between her and the Duke.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... People are wrong to say life's too short. I'd tell a child life's as long as you want to make it. And you do that by making it interesting.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Lassoing cattle. I was a cowboy in Arizona for five years from 1966 and I'm pretty good at it.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The American actress Tallulah Bankhead gave me an original celluloid of the *Wicked Fairy* from *Sleeping Beauty* of 1959. I lent it to The Observer Film Exhibition later and it was never returned. I hear it is worth up to £4 million now, so if anyone knows where it is, do let me know. **The unending quest that drives you on...** Curiosity. I'm forever interested in new things, so I never get bored.

The poem that touches your soul... I love an untitled poem by the 17th-century English writer Thomas Traherne. It feels as if he's writing about my life, which is why it's the epigram to my autobiography, *Redeeming Features*.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I keep changing my image.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting a job on *Vogue* magazine in New York in 1962. It was an amazing time and I met everyone – even Martin Luther King.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I would steal the late artist Lucian Freud's private collection of paintings at his house in London's Notting Hill. I used to go there frequently and it's a seamless panorama of beauty.

The song that means most to you... *Street Of Dreams* by Lee Wiley, an American chanteuse of the 40s and 50s. It always gives me goosebumps.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... A magical night I spent on the island of Elba in 1990 with the lost love I mentioned earlier.

The saddest time that shook your world... Getting polio when I was seven. I was in a cast for three years and feared I'd never walk again, but I recovered. The good news was I didn't have to do national service.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To create a scent, but it costs at least £7 million.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Diana Cooper instilled in me to always say yes to an invitation.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd want the Eton College choir to sing *Abide With Me*, which always makes me cry. Hopefully, Tom Stoppard would do the address and then I'd love everyone to do a waltz.

The way you want to be remembered... Just to be remembered would be a coup.

The Plug... Find out about Nicky's design work and his new range of fabrics at www.nh-design.co.uk ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Relive the Motown days with *The Complete Singles*, a new three-disc Diana Ross & The Supremes collection, out on Monday. Or catch Meryl Streep's mesmerising portrayal of Margaret Thatcher in *The Iron Lady*, in cinemas now



NEXT WEEK

- Philip Glenister on the return of black comedy *Mad Dogs*
- Meet the Fabulous Baker Brothers – two cooks on a mission to get men into the kitchen
- Jamie Oliver's deliciously exotic soups
- PLUS Britain's most detailed TV listings