

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: MasterChef's Monica Galetti



'Everyone thinks I'm stern and grumpy. I'm always smiling on MasterChef but it gets edited out!'

The prized possession you value above all others... Family photos. I was brought up in Western Samoa and then New Zealand and have very few photos from childhood, so those that remain are precious.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A white gold pendant in the shape of a chilli, which was a birthday present from a friend in 2003. It broke at work, so I wrapped it in clingfilm and put it in my pocket, but I must have somehow thrown it away.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...

King George VI. I became intrigued by him after watching *The King's Speech*. I'd love to meet him at that pivotal time in his life.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Drivers who indicate randomly. You never know what someone who does that will do next.

Right: King George VI. Above, right: Walnut and ginger cake. Far right: Riomaggiore in Italy



The temptation you wish you could resist... Cake in all its forms. Walnut and ginger is one of my favourites.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Uncle Tom's Cabin, the 19th-century anti-slavery novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe. It's so moving how Tom never loses his faith in humanity.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd follow the Spanish chef Ferran Adrià, who created El Bulli, around. He's one of the best chefs in the world.

The film you can watch time and time again... Forrest Gump. I love its humour. When I want someone to work faster in the kitchen, I say, 'Run, Forrest. Run!'

The person who has influenced you most... Michel Roux Jr, my boss at restaurant Le Gavroche, which has two Michelin stars. He taught me yelling at people doesn't get results.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Make sure you travel a lot before you settle down. Seeing the world feeds your imagination.



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Scuba diving. I really love watching the fish and coral. It's so peaceful.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Letting my husband David [head sommelier at Le Gavroche] drive our new Mercedes ML first! When it was my turn he got annoyed because I had to adjust the seat. That started an argument and I vowed never to drive it again.

The unending quest that drives you on... To keep learning new tricks in my industry. The day you stop learning is the day you hang up your apron.

The poem that touches your soul... Comme Un Chef [Like A Chef], by a French judge at the Bocuse d'Or, the World Cooking Championships in 1997, which I competed in. He read it out and it was very inspiring. It really captured the passion of our craft.

The song that means most to you... When We Dance by Sting. It's very romantic and it was played for our first dance at our wedding in 2004.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm stern and grumpy! I'm always smiling when we make MasterChef, but it gets edited out! People meet me and say, 'You're much nicer in real life!'

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Coming to England on holiday in 1997. I got a glimpse of London life and loved it so I went home, saved up, and came back a few years later. I've been here ever since.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd cook a banquet in the State rooms at Buckingham Palace for friends and family, then leave without clearing up!

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

I'd watch the sunrise at Savaii Island in Western Samoa with David and our daughter Anais, who's seven. I'd eat local fruit and drink from the freshest coconut. After that I'd take pictures of the salt flats at Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia. We'd have a picnic lunch – prepared by the best chef in South

America – at Machu Picchu in Peru. I'd spend the afternoon relaxing in the hot springs in Turkey, then have a glass of Krug champagne with David before ending the day at Riomaggiore in northern Italy. We'd be joined by all my family from New Zealand and then the Italian chef Massimo Bottura would cook us one of his wacky pasta dishes. We'd see out the day gazing at the view while drinking Meursault.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Anais's birth. She's brought a sense of balance to my life.

The saddest time that shook your world... Moving from Samoa to New Zealand. I was raised in Samoa by two aunts while my mum worked in Auckland. I joined her when I was seven and I remember arriving there in winter. I was so homesick.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... For David and I to open our own restaurant.

The philosophy that underpins your life... The show must go on.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd want something short and simple, followed by a party to celebrate my life. I will leave a menu of fantastic food and great wine.

The way you want to be remembered... As a loving wife, mother and friend. And as someone who *smiled* a lot!

The Plug... Monica will be at the Taste of London festival, Regent's Park, 18-22 June. www.london.tastefestivals.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: REX FEATURES; GETTY IMAGES; LMKMEDIA

PS...

Kevin Costner's back on the big screen in action thriller 3 Days To Kill – in cinemas Friday. Claire Forlani hits the London stage in The Colby Sisters Of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at the Tricycle Theatre. And Lana Del Rey's album Ultraviolence is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Don't miss our FREE glossy Mary Berry magazine – Cook Now, Eat Later ● John McEnroe on his temper – and Andy Murray's chances at Wimbledon ● PLUS Britain's best TV listings