



From top: John Lennon's Imagine, Hong Kong harbour, caviar, Chinese characters, Chairman Mao, The Godfather Part II, a caipirinha cocktail and John F Kennedy

**The prized possession you value above all others...** A black Chinese robe I had made four years ago in Hong Kong. The silk feels like the finest leather. When I was younger I went crazy for designer clothes, but I'm 64 now and I've started dressing like an old Chinese monk!

**The unqualified regret you wish you could amend...** That I didn't learn Chinese as a child. I was educated in Chicago and went to a Chinese school three hours a day, but I just made trouble. I visit China these days and I can only write about 50 characters, so I'm essentially illiterate, which is a shame.

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

I'd have a healthy breakfast of rice porridge with 1,000-year-old-egg [an egg preserved for months until it turns black and pungent] at a cafe beside Hong Kong harbour, then meet some friends for lunch at La Coupole in Paris, where I'd have a seafood platter and a glass of dry white wine. Later I'd check into a beachfront room at the Copacabana Palace Hotel in Rio de Janeiro, swim in its pool, have a massage and, at sunset, take a walk on the beach and have some feijoada [Brazilian black bean stew] with caipirinha cocktails. Afterwards I'd fly to my flat in Bangkok and dine outside at the Baan Klang Nam seafood restaurant, before watching a DVD at home. These days I prefer quiet nights!

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Books. When I travel I go crazy buying them and have to take two extra suitcases with me. I have around 6,000!

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** The General by Jonathan Fenby, about Charles de Gaulle and how he saved France. I live in Paris much of the time and that book helped me understand and love the French.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd listen in at a meeting of the Chinese politburo to hear what the seven men in charge of 1.4 billion people actually discuss.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Loud, rude people who use the F-word. I liked a time when etiquette and manners were important.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** The Godfather Part II – it reminds me of growing up in Chicago, where the Italian community ran everything. I worked in my uncle's restaurant and when the Italians came in you never dared give them a bill.



'I wish I'd learnt Chinese as a child – I can only write 50 characters so I'm essentially illiterate when I visit there'

The

## DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's cooking legend Ken Hom*

**The person who has influenced you most...** My mother Ying Fong. She always demanded I do better, so it's because of her that I've succeeded and have a passion for all the things I do.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Chairman Mao. I want to know why he screwed up! He freed China after the war but let 30 million die through famine. China was held back by around 50 years through his incompetence.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Giving is better than receiving.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** History. I'll happily take a 700-page history book to the beach!

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** I'm very philosophical about possessions. Even when I started losing my hair in my 40s I wasn't bothered. Instead, I shaved it all off and people started saying I looked better and younger!

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To be honest and true to myself.

**The poem that touches your soul...** One Today, which the US poet Richard Blanco wrote for President Obama's inauguration. It was so moving when he read it that I cried.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm the restaurateur Ken Lo. People come up to me to say how much they love his restaurants, but he died in 1995!

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Meeting my partner in 1971. It's protected me from the pitfalls that accompany fame and success.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd empty the bank accounts of all the world's dictators and give the money to charity.

**The song that means most to you...** John Lennon's Imagine, because in my heart I'm an old hippie.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** The day in 1962 when President Kennedy allowed Chinese families to bring relatives to the US. It brought my mother so much joy when my aunt and her family joined us.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** When my mum died in 2010 from colon cancer. She was 89. I was in Japan at the time and couldn't be with her because I was being treated for prostate cancer – an impossible situation.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To be a singer. But on a cruise in 1996 I did a karaoke version of Roy Orbison's Crying and people said to me, 'Ken, stick to the cooking!'

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Treat people how you want to be treated.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I want Imagine to be played as I'm cremated, then for everyone to feast on caviar, Peking duck and lots of champagne.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As someone who shared his philosophy, possessions, love – and food.

**The Plug...** Please support [www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk](http://www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk) and [www.prostatecanceruk.org](http://www.prostatecanceruk.org). ■

As told Rob McGibbon

PS...

*Monsters University, the prequel to 2001's monster hit Monsters Inc, hits cinemas on Friday. Chiwetel Ejiofor stars in A Season In The Congo at London's Young Vic theatre. And Remixes And Rarities, a greatest hits CD from Paul Young, is out on Monday*



**NEXT WEEK**

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