



From top: Flying, a beach outside Saint-Tropez, The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader, cricketer Kevin Pietersen, Hugh Grant in Notting Hill, online Scrabble, Burgh Island Hotel, Talisker whisky and Edouard Manet

The prized possession you value above all others... Our semi-detached Victorian house in south-east London. My wife Julia and I bought it in 1987. It's full of character and is part of me.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... That I haven't conquered my fear of flying.

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

I'd have a slap-up breakfast of scrambled eggs, crispy bacon and maple syrup with Julia in a New York deli. Then we'd travel by train to the South of France, admiring the views, then settle on a beach just outside Saint-Tropez and have a seafood lunch. I'd have some The Ned Pinot Grigio wine then take a dip in the sea. In the afternoon I'd go to Twickenham with some mates and Julia to watch England thrash the French at rugby, then I'd arrive at Augusta to watch the final nine holes of The Masters. I'd end the day at home with Julia and our five children – Alice, 27, Caroline, 24, Fred, 21, Harry, 19, and Connie, 13. I'm the fire god in our family, so I would light a huge barbecue, but Julia is a great cook, so I'd then hand over to her. I'd end the day with a nip or two of fine Talisker whisky.

The temptation you wish you could resist... The third, fourth – even the fifth – helping of Julia's slow-cooked belly of pork in Thai spices.

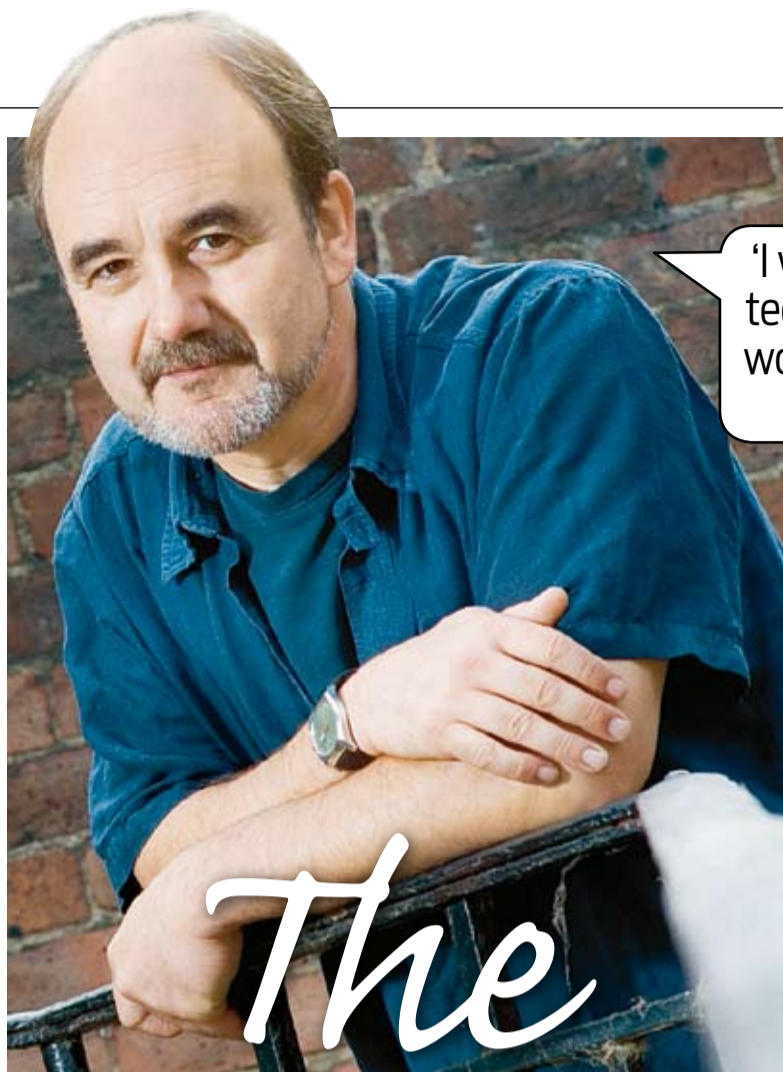
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Voyage Of The Dawn Treader by CS Lewis. I read it in my late teens when I was a hippie. I had long hair and wore an Afghan coat and beads and bracelets and it takes me back to those days.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd stand next to Kevin Pietersen as he destroys the Australian attack in The Ashes at Lord's. He's an astounding batsman.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Smug parents who brag about their kids drive me mad.

The film you can watch time and time again... Bizarrely it's Notting Hill. I have a soft spot for romcoms.

The person who has influenced you most... The theatre director Max Stafford-Clarke, who I worked with at London's Royal Court in the 1980s. He taught me how to focus on the truth, accuracy and reality in every stage performance.



'I was a hippie in my late teens, I had long hair and wore an Afghan coat and beads and bracelets'

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 actor David Haig

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... The 19th-century French painter Edouard Manet. The women he painted were so enigmatic, I'd love to know about his relationship with them.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Think outwards, think generously and avoid self-absorption. You find greater contentment when you think of other people rather than yourself. I certainly do.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Cleaning swimming pools. Whenever I go on holiday and there's a pool, I take great pleasure in cleaning it. It's such a satisfying task.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A painting by the Indian artist Francis Newton Souza which my father, an art dealer, gave to me in the 80s. I've no idea what became of it, but now Souza has become collectable and it'd be worth £200,000!

The unending quest that drives you on... To succeed in what I do, whether it's acting, writing or playing online Scrabble with my son Fred. My competitive spirit is not something I can control!

The poem that touches your soul... So Many Different Lengths Of Time by Brian Patten. It's a very accurate summary of what it means to lose someone.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm very controlled. As all control freaks know, we're on the cusp of imploding.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... My younger sister Karen's death from a brain haemorrhage at 22, in 1982. I was 26 and it made me realise that nothing is certain.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd water my garden during a hosepipe ban.

The song that means most to you... In The Garden by Van Morrison. I love our garden and that song has such a beautiful sentiment.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Our wedding at Burgh Island Hotel in Devon on 27 December 2010. We'd been together since 1979, but never married. We felt it was best not to change anything. Getting married so much later was like we were celebrating a great achievement.

The saddest time that shook your world... The death of our daughter Grace, who was stillborn at full term in 1996. It was horrendous. Julia and I have worked for Sands charity [Stillbirth and Neonatal Death] ever since and it's a very worthwhile charity.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be solvent.

The philosophy that underpins your life... To live each precious moment.

The order of service at your funeral... I don't believe there's anything after you die, so I'll leave it to others to decide.

The way you want to be remembered... More good than bad.

The Plug... David appears in King Lear at the Theatre Royal Bath, 25 July-10 August. www.theatreroyal.org.uk ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Simon Pegg teams up with Nick Frost again in comedy The World's End – in cinemas now. Maureen Lipman stars in Daytona, a play about ballroom dancing, at London's brand new Park Theatre. And the Pet Shop Boys' latest album Electric is out on Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Chris O'Dowd on his new BBC sitcom Family Tree
- Going underground with Chris Packham's nature show The Burrowers
- Jamie Oliver cooks summer soups
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings