



'People think of me as a maverick, a real hot-head. But I'm actually soft and incredibly patient'

The prized possession you value above all others... A lock of hair from my ten-year-old daughter Mirabelle. It was cut when she was three.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I have no regrets because my mistakes have given me the knowledge that has made me the man I am today. Regrets are anchors that drag you back.

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

The only place I'd want to be is in the British countryside. I would go fishing or deerstalking, then home to spend time with my children [Marco also has Luciano, 18, and Marco Jnr, 16]. I'm a private person and hardly ever go to big parties, so I'd be happy staying in and having a long hot bath.

The temptation you wish you could resist... I blinker out the normal temptations because they take me away from work. I'm totally obsessed with starting new ventures – like pubs or restaurants – so you could say that's my temptation. But I'm happy *not* to resist.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Ma Gastronomie by Fernand Point. He is the father of modern French cuisine. One of his mantras always stays with me: 'Perfection is lots of little things done well.'

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd watch the staff in all of my businesses and give them a real fright if they did something I didn't like.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Lack of attention to detail. Detail is vital and is the difference between success and failure, but sadly not everyone has the same eye as me.

The film you can watch time and time again... The Big Blue starring Jean-Marc Barr is a beautiful film about free diving in the sea. I love the metaphorical thread about life and death.

The person who has influenced you most... My mother, Maria-Rosa. She died from a brain haemorrhage in 1968 when I was six. She'd already instilled in me the importance of being honourable. Losing her was the fuel that drove me to succeed and gave me the need to be accepted. I think every boy should build a monument to his mother.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... I'd like to sit at a bar with Dean Martin, but we'd need more than a pint! He was the coolest guy who ever lived.

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: legendary chef Marco Pierre White

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Never trust a lazy person. Anyone who is lazy at work or lazy about life will let you down.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Nature. It's like a surrogate mother to me and it teaches you everything you need to know.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My restaurant in Mayfair called Mirabelle, which I sold in 2009. It was close to my heart.

The unending quest that drives you on... To find peace.

The poem that touches your soul... If by Rudyard Kipling. I love the way he asserts that it's every man's duty to stand up and be a man.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People think of me as a maverick, a real hot-headed *enfant terrible*. But I'm actually highly concentrated, disciplined, soft-mannered and incredibly patient. But

why would I want to change the perception? It hasn't done me any harm.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... The death of my mother. Not a day goes by that I don't think about her.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... My conscience would not be able to live with it. I was brought up to respect people.

The song that means most to you... I Wan'na Be Like You, by the orangutan King Louie in *The Jungle Book*, makes me smile like nothing else.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... I turned 50 on 11 December, and went to see my daughter dance as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker* at the Bloomsbury Theatre. Tears of joy streamed down my face.

The saddest time that shook your world... The moment my mother collapsed and died at our council house in Leeds. I watched as she was carried on a stretcher to an ambulance with a red blanket over her. The doors closed and that was the last time I saw her.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I have fulfilled so many ambitions during my career with my restaurants and Michelin stars. I could never commit myself emotionally again to reach the same heights, but I am content with that. As the ancient military commander Hannibal said before his last battle, 'Let us dress for war, when all I want is peace.'

The philosophy that underpins your life... A tree without roots is just a piece of wood.

The order of service at your funeral... I am too busy living my life for today and being a free spirit to think about such things. I believe once you're gone, that's it. I'll let my children decide how they want to say their farewell.

The way you want to be remembered... As a kind and loving person who gave more than he took.

The Plug... Marco's pub, The Hansom Cab in Kensington, recently won two rosettes from the AA Pub Guide. For bookings, call 020 7938 3700 or visit www.thehansomcab.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

From top: The Big Blue, deerstalking, the British countryside, King Louie from *The Jungle Book*, Mirabelle restaurant in Mayfair, Dean Martin, Hannibal

PS...

Fresh from Sherlock, Benedict Cumberbatch hits the big screen in War Horse. Cranford's Lisa Dillon stars in The Taming Of The Shrew at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford. And violin virtuoso Nigel Kennedy is touring until 23 January



NEXT WEEK

● Who'll walk off with the gongs at television's biggest awards show? ● Cookery's first family on their recipe for success ● Jamie Oliver gives the humble sandwich a makeover ● PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide