



From top: Switzerland; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; wine from Burgundy; Bonaparte Café; The Magnificent Ambersons; tarte au pomme; mathematics; Upstairs Downstairs and shopping in Paris

The prized possession you value above all others... My father Harry's book of Samuel Taylor Coleridge poetry. When he died in 1991, the book was on his bedside table.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... I mourn the loss of a proper education. I left school at 12 for a theatre school where the focus was on dance. I educated myself.

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

I would breakfast at Le Bonaparte Café in Paris, where even at my age – I'm 77 – I get appreciative looks from men, which is a wonderful way to start the day. I'd then go skiing in Switzerland, before a picnic lunch in the Chiltern Hills. Back to Paris for clothes shopping then I'd go to a concert by the National Children's Orchestra at The Sage in Gateshead. Finally, I'd head to New York for the night.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Wine. I don't drink much, so I make sure it is expensive premier cru from Bordeaux or Burgundy.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Good Soldier by Ford Madox Ford. It has a peculiar mix of humour and tragedy. I discover something new each time I read it.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I am always moved by people who are struggling in life, so I would secretly help to make their life a bit easier.

The way fame and fortune has changed you, for better and worse... I can still go on buses although I often hear people saying, 'No, it can't be her, she doesn't need the bus.' As for the fortune, well, I am comfortable and I will always work.

The film you can watch time and time again... The Magnificent Ambersons, directed by Orson Wells in 1942. It predicts how inventions bring great advantage but can also be catastrophic. It is a remarkably affecting film.

The person who has influenced you most... My father. He was a working-class printer's assistant and had a hard life. He was brilliant and self-taught. I had huge respect for him. He made me appreciate the arts.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... The 19th-century French politician and philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. I'd discuss his comment



In Paris, I still get appreciative looks from men – even at the age of 77. It's wonderful

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's acting legend Jean Marsh

'property is theft' – over a glass of red wine and a tarte au pomme!

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Never get set in your ways. The world's full of possibilities.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Maths. I am fascinated by prime factors. They are poetic.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A beautiful and expensive French coffee cup. It had two handles and I used it every

day until it was lost in a house move.

The unending quest that drives you on... Finding an ordered system for books and files. I have chaotic piles of stuff.

The poem that touches your soul... No Time Ago by E.E. Cummings. The late John Mortimer introduced me to it. It gives me empathy for anyone who is lonely. I live alone, but I am happy.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People think I have confidence but I am actu-

ally very shy. The only thing I have great confidence in is my cooking.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... I co-created Upstairs Downstairs with Eileen Atkins and ITV commissioned the series. It was incredibly exciting!

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I simply couldn't commit a crime. I feel guilty even when I haven't done anything!

The song that means most to you... Where'er You Walk, from Handel's opera, Semele. It reminds me of my mother Emma singing at home.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... I went on a short break with an ex-beau to Switzerland for my 50th. We were on a beautiful walk and I thought, I am *so* happy. At that moment, my friend called out, 'I am *so* happy.' It made everything special.

The saddest time that shook your world... My father's death. He died from a brain tumour and it took me several years to get over the loss. I was distressed that his life had been so unsatisfactory. He wanted to achieve so much more, but for whatever reason he never fully realised his potential and that caused a lot of anger in him.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I wish I'd worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National Theatre. I am too old now, but maybe I could be an extra.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Don't be afraid to change your mind. When I change mine, I think, 'I was wrong, but now I am right!'

The order of service at your funeral... I'd like a traditional Catholic mass in a country church with Mozart's Requiem. I've put aside money for a wonderful party with great champagne.

The way you want to be remembered... I would be happy if people thought: Jean is dead. Oh, I will miss her!

The Plug... My novel Fiennders Abbey is out now and The House of Eliott is released in December. Both are published by Pan Macmillan at £7.99. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Almost a year in the making, X Factor winner Matt Cardle's debut album *Letters* is out on Monday. See the Three Musketeers in 3D as a new version of Dumas' classic hits cinemas. And Mark Rylance brings Jerusalem back to



NEXT WEEK

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