

TOM ALLEN

The comedian enjoys a bit of napkin folding – just don't ask him to cook...

What's the view from your sofa?

There's a mirror, in front of which are hydrangeas I cut from my garden. The view is also of a desk, in what I try to call my "drawing room" – but that's a bit pretentious, even for me.

Any TV turn-offs?

My problem with watching something like *Question Time* is I know it's a trap. People get angry with each other. I think I'll just watch a bit of it – but then I end up watching the whole thing and then feel angry as a result. We must never undervalue the importance of entertainment and light-heartedness. However stressful the world gets, we need those moments of levity.

Who controls the remote in your household?

My mum is staying with me at the moment. She'll put on a programme she likes – and that's not always what I like. But we won't talk about it. We'll just leave it on and I'll say, "Oh gosh, we're still watching this, are we?" It's passive aggressive!

As co-presenter on *Cooking with the Stars*, how do you fare in the kitchen?

You'd think I'd have learnt a lot, but I'm rubbish. I'm bad and overconfident, which is a lethal combination. I put too much salt on things, so a lot of my food just tastes like crisps.

The first episode in this latest series was dinner party week. Who would be your top dinner party guest?

Queen Elizabeth I. Within every gay man there is a longing to spend time with a strong female character. Imagine being, like, "I'm in charge now", shaving your hair off and putting a ginger wig on. Iconic, as the young people would say.

Was comedy a safe space for you when you were growing up?

There wasn't really a lot of stand-up,



not like there is now. I would sit with my mum and watch Victoria Wood a lot. My mum always taught me to be funny – it was a way to laugh at any pettiness or meanness around. It helped us to process the world a bit. Being an outsider, it allowed me a space to laugh at the inside. It's a form of meditation, being able to step back, in order to cope with feeling different or vulnerable. Laughing at the world was a way of coping.

When you were starting out in comedy did you have to deal with a lot of heckling on stage?

You have to learn how to weather those storms. I'd come out and talk about my mum's hostess trolley and a group of stag parties would be furious. They did not want to hear about napkin folding. They were, like, "How dare you?" You learn to be honest in front of people, and that's when they connect with you – and then you can talk about napkin folding.

You've written two memoirs, *No Shame* and *Too Much*, which became

DOWN TIME



COMFORT TV
Downton Abbey.
I've always enjoyed period dramas – I watch them for inspiration for my own interiors.



TV SNACK & DRINK OF CHOICE
I think snacking is something you do at the table. I might have a brandy or herbal tea.

an ode to your dad who died suddenly – was writing an outlet for you?

In my first book, *No Shame*, I'd been angry about growing up in suburbia, and I felt like no one understood me. And then my dad died. I learnt a lot about my dad writing *Too Much* – how he had tried to protect me and understand me, as well as how we had tried to connect with each other.

Earlier this year, you made a programme, *Big Gay Wedding*, celebrating the tenth anniversary of same-sex marriage – what did doing that mean to you?

It was so interesting and challenging. I learnt that it was a real cross-party effort, people from different political parties coming together to get it over the line. But it was essentially about love. The more I learnt, the more I realised it wasn't just about recognition, but that we have equality with straight people, which felt like such a strong message. **CHARLEY ROSS**

Tom Allen and Emma Willis present *Cooking with the Stars*, Tuesdays 8pm ITV1

NEXT WEEK IN RADIO TIMES Jessica Ennis Hill on *Who Do You Think You Are?* **On sale 6 August**