

flower child

Hollywood is enough to make any actor guarded and defensive but Australian Teresa Palmer is cut from a different cloth. She invites Elaine Lipworth into her home for a heartfelt talk about what matters most to her.

Teresa Palmer arrives for our interview at an LA restaurant with company. In her arms is 20-month-old son Bodhi, and by her side is stepson Isaac, 7.

As we venture inside it becomes clear that any conversation is going to be impossible. It's crowded and noisy and the boys are getting restless.

Without hesitation, Palmer suggests we decamp to her house.

Stars' homes tend to be out-of-bounds and any incursion into their personal domain is quickly shut down in this age of tightly controlled media access.

But as becomes apparent, Teresa Palmer is one to follow her heart rather than the rules.

At the family's sprawling hillside house, the lounge room is cosy and lived in, the floor strewn with toys.

Bodhi toddles over, bawling, and climbs onto his mother's lap. She instinctively lifts her top and lets him latch on to her breast, gently stroking his head until he falls asleep.

Palmer has an attachment parenting style that includes breastfeeding on demand and co-sleeping. Work, she says, has to fit around her son and not the other way round.

"The baby goes everywhere with me," she says.

"I haven't spent one night away from him. We have a family bed. We don't use a nanny, unless I'm working.

Being a mum is my absolute passion. Straight up, I want six children. I actually thought I'd already be giving birth to my second child by now and that hasn't happened. I may have to stop breastfeeding."

With Bodhi napping we retreat to the family "Zen Den" full of books, candles and crystals. Palmer sits cross-legged on the bed, her arms wrapped around a fluffy cushion.

She is not wearing make-up, her hair

is swept up in a messy bun, and she's dressed in a peasant top over jean shorts.

There is a clear view of the Hollywood sign from the house, which she shares with her husband, filmmaker Mark Webber, Bodhi, Isaac and their three dogs.

The symbolism of the iconic landmark isn't lost on the Adelaide-born actor. The next year will be her busiest yet.

Upcoming films include *Knight Of Cups* from director Terrence Malick, with Christian Bale, *Triple Nine* with Kate Winslet and *Berlin Syndrome* from Australian filmmaker Cate Shortland. After years of playing "the object of affection", Palmer says: "I'm in a position where I have more of a say in what I do."

"I'm excited about portraying strong women who have a voice."

Her latest film, *Point Break*, is a remake of the 1991 adrenalin-fuelled action hit, in which she plays Samsara, a woman on a spiritual journey, who falls in with a gang of thrill-seeking idealists. "My character holds down the fort. She's the glue that holds the group together," she says.

Samsara falls for undercover FBI agent Johnny Utah, played by Keanu Reeves in the original version and Australian actor Luke Bracey in the remake.

The film is full of breathtaking stunts: sheer-face snowboarding and big-wave surfing. Palmer didn't surf, but her role is still action-packed.

"I'm on a motorbike. I do rock climbing and free diving, 20 feet under the surface of the water."

Webber walks in, delivering bottles of kombucha (a fermented health drink) and Palmer switches to telling me how their romance started. Trawling the net one night, she came across a trailer for a film he had directed, and sent him an impromptu tweet.

A relationship blossomed on email,

which Palmer says was like an "old-fashioned courtship with love letters".

"I wrote about my dreams for the future, how I wanted to use my position to affect positive change in the world. He wrote back, saying he wanted the same things."

A big believer in manifesting her dreams, Palmer had already written down what she was looking for in a partner, right down to the eye colour.

The couple's first date took place at a vegan restaurant. They got married on a beach in Mexico two years ago, while Palmer was six months pregnant.

Indeed the couple seem smitten; they exchange affectionate glances and light touches when they pass each other.

Palmer is friendly with Webber's ex-partner, American actress Frankie Shaw. They share custody of Isaac and have "a great co-parenting situation. We're all really open and communicative. My mum calls it being a hippie," she laughs, "but its

just about meeting the child's needs."

Palmer herself had a challenging upbringing. Her parents, Kevin Palmer, a businessman, and Paula Sanders, a former nurse, divorced when she was three. She was raised by her mother, who suffers schizoaffective disorder, a chronic mental illness that includes mood swings similar to bipolar disorder, together with symptoms of schizophrenia.

"[Mum] was really sick," she says.

"My childhood certainly wasn't conventional, there weren't a lot of boundaries. I got to watch TV as much as I wanted and I slept in my mum's bed until I was 12. But I was happy. My mum's love was unwavering and that gave me an amazing confidence." She touches the cross around her neck, which her devoutly Catholic mother had blessed for her.

Palmer remains close to her father too, as well as her stepmother Kaaren.

"I've been rocked by some pretty intense things this past year. My stepbrother [Kaaren's son] died. He was 30 and he was my closest of my siblings growing up," she says.

Palmer's mother also was diagnosed with breast cancer and is now in remission.

Palmer was raised in the Catholic faith, and now follows a broadly spiritual path that includes meditation and is influenced by Buddhism. "My mum is very Catholic, so it was quite confronting for her that I didn't follow in her footsteps with things like going to church every Sunday and no sex before marriage, but we both have the same morals. Now, I don't have a label for what I am."

Together with her good friend Australian actor Phoebe Tonkin, she launched a wellness website "Your Zen Life" in 2012.

On the site, Palmer presents "Tez



Instagram shots of Teresa Palmer with 20-month-old Bodhi; and with stepson Isaac, 7, and husband, filmmaker Mark Webber.



Photography by Hilary Walsh/trunkarchive.com/Snapper Media

Talks” (a wordplay on TEDx talks), in which she gives heartfelt monologues on life, motherhood and finding balance with titles such as “Finding Clarity” and “Manifesting Greatness and Love”.

“I film them at home and I never wear make-up because I feel I have a responsibility to get the message out that what people look up to in celebrities is a façade,” she says.

“The way we look on the red carpet and in magazines is not real.”

In her 20s she was advised to go to the gym by an agent. Upset by the implication that she needed to be thinner, she started following a strict diet, existing on salad, fish and avocado. “I dropped weight really quickly and of course I felt I looked good, but I had unhealthy relationship with food,” she says.

“I listen to my body now, I know you just need to eat what feels right, which means fresh organic food.”

She strives to remain unaffected by the celebrity bubble in which she works.

“Everyone puts us on a pedestal,” she confesses, revealing that there’s a pecking order on film sets.

“I can understand how people start to have a skewed vision of who they are. I try and cut down on all that. At lunch, the actor is supposed to push in front of everyone else to get their lunch. I’m always like, ‘nope. I’m good waiting in line.’”

Palmer is also candid about the celebrity freebies that she believes can lead to a sense of entitlement. “Boxes and boxes of free clothes are sent to you all the time, she says, adding “I am so not a fashionista.”

She has spent time in Australia recently working with Mel Gibson on his new World War II drama, *Hacksaw Ridge*, alongside fellow Australians Sam Worthington and Rachel Griffiths. he was so different than what I expected,” said of Gibson. “He was sensitive and funny and shy. He was so beautiful with my son, picking him up and swinging him in the air.”

Our interview over, we return to the living room. Palmer says her big dream, other than having “a gaggle of children”, is “to own a sustainable farm in Australia. “You know life can be unpredictable and in this career you don’t know where your next job is coming from. All this is surreal,” she says, gazing out of the window at the Hollywood sign, “but it also makes me believe in magic”. Then her screaming son tears across the room, grabbing at his mother’s shirt and bringing the actress right back down to earth. •

Point Break is in cinemas January 1.

