

MOVING IN WITH BOYFRIEND EDDIE DENISE VAN OUTEN

STAR MUM AND HER BEAU SAY HELLO TO THEIR FIRST FAMILY HOME

'Settling in as a family has been so exciting. We couldn't be happier'



Surrounded by a sumptuous interior of plush velvets and dramatic animal prints, theatre and TV star Denise Van Outen is in her element as she welcomes us to her stunning Essex home for an exclusive interview and photoshoot.

The stylish six-bedroom property marks the start of a fresh chapter in Denise's life, for moving in with her and daughter Betsy, eight, is long-term boyfriend Eddie Boxshall.

"Living together feels just right for us now," says Denise, who met the oil broker five years ago on a blind date set up by their friend, Heart DJ Zoe Hardman. "Some people might think: 'They've taken their time,' but we never felt the need to rush. We're both parents and in our mid-40s. We wanted our relationship to progress naturally.

"This is our first place together. Finding it, doing it up and settling in as a family has been so exciting. We couldn't be happier."

LEAD PROPOSAL

Recent press reports claim Eddie has proposed, but the pair are keen to set the record straight. "We're not engaged – yet," says Denise. "We have talked about it, but I'll let Eddie take the lead on that."

"Let's wait and see," he teases. "We need to make sure she can handle me for seven days a week."

With three children and two marriages between them, the couple have had to proceed with sensitivity. The result is one big happy extended family, with their nearest and dearest nearby as the popular star returns to her Essex roots. Denise, who shares daughter Betsy with ex-husband Lee Mead, is also thrilled that the 37-year-old *Holby City* star lives just around the corner.

"We're really good friends," she says.

"He often comes around for dinner and
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Denise relaxes in style in the Essex home she shares with boyfriend Eddie Boxshall (together, left) and her daughter Betsy – their first family home



have as far to drive. We've been respectful of each other and given each other time to adjust to new relationships. That's been so important for Betsy."

Her daughter's happiness has been at the heart of every decision she makes. "It was essential that Betsy liked any new man in my life," she says. "She loves Eddie and he has brought a sense of stability into our lives. Watching them together is so comical. They love winding each other up – and raiding each other's sweet jars."

"I adore Betsy," says Eddie. "I look upon her as if she were my own daughter."

Until they find a suitable school, Betsy, who suffers from dyslexia and dyscalculia, is being home-schooled.

A FRESH START

"Betsy has made lots of new friends, has the puppy she's always wanted and is enjoying having a private tutor," says Denise. "We've spent many precious months together, too. When I broke my foot while training for West End show *Chicago*, I had to pull out and recover. During that time with Betsy I learnt more about her than I had since she was born."

Betsy's musical tastes are no mystery, though, with *Spice World* inspiring the Cool Britannia theme in her bedroom.

"She loves the Spice Girls," says Denise. "She chose a bed the same colour as the red Spice bus, and to complement it we installed bowler-hat lights, a red post box and a London theme."

Like Denise, Eddie puts family first as the proud father of Jordan, 24, and Leah, 19. "It's the most important part of my life," he says. "I had my kids when I was only 22 and although my ex and I parted after 20 years, we're still the best of



Building blocks of family: Eddie plays Jenga with Betsy (left) in the dining room, where an ostrich-feather lamp exemplifies Denise's love of animal-themed clothes and decor



(OPENING SPREAD) DRESS: ZARA. SHOES: KURT GEIGER. EDDIE'S TOP: HAMMOND & CO BY PATRICK GRANT AT DEBENHAMS. TROUSERS: RACING GREEN AT DEBENHAMS. (LEFT) DENISE'S DRESS: PRIMROSE PARK. Betsy's DRESS: ZARA. EDDIE'S TOP: REISS. (RIGHT) DENISE'S JUMPER: TOPSHOP. JEANS: ZARA. BOOTS: KURT GEIGER. EDDIE'S TOP & TROUSERS: REISS

'It's nice to have a man around to do the things I can't. If something breaks, I just shout: "Eddie!"'



Denise and Eddie in his 43 domain – the kitchen – with the newest family member, pet pooch Matilda



Girl power: Mum and daughter spend quality time together as they share a joke in Betsy's bedroom (above). The youngster has inherited her mum's eye for design and helped create the room, taking inspiration from Spice Girls movie *Spice World*. The Cool Britannia theme extends to a red pillar box (below)



'It was essential that Betsy liked Eddie. She loves him and he has brought stability to our lives'

friends. After the break-up I was in no rush to meet anyone else. I just focused on being a good dad and my career.

"I never thought I'd get another chance to have that complete family feeling again – until I met Denise. She's like a breath of fresh air, bringing fun and laughter back into my life."

The couple spent months viewing scores of properties, until Eddie told Denise he had found The One.

"He told me: 'You're going to love it,' and he was right. As we drove up to the gates, my heart leapt. It was exactly what we'd been searching for: a beautiful family home – rural, but near a town and accessible to London – where we could entertain family and friends.

RIGHT FROM THE OFF

"I only had to walk into the hallway to know it was right for us. It was airy and spacious, with rooms for guests and lots of natural light flooding in. I mouthed:

'I want this house,' to Eddie behind the estate agent's back. It was so exciting."

Smiling at the memory, Eddie recalls: "I had to tell her to shush. We didn't want to appear too keen before making an offer."

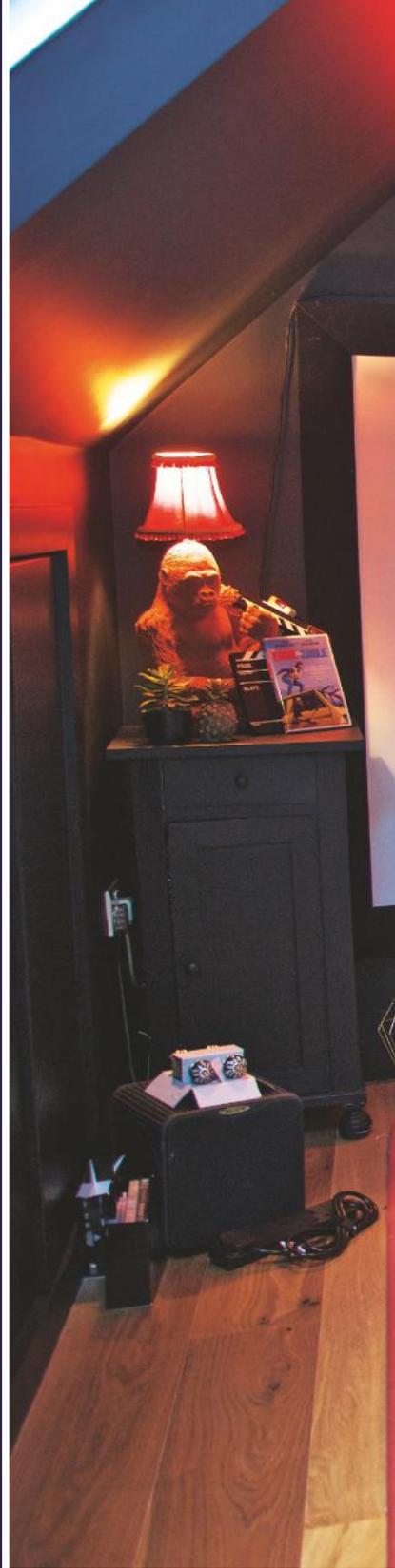
With help from Denise's friend Zoe of Bespoke Interiors, the couple spent a year putting their own stamp on the property, which features a mini cinema and games room. They moved in just before Christmas.

"I was worried Eddie might think some of my ideas were too girlie," says Denise, who, as well as being on the *Loose Women* panel and judging on *Ireland's Got Talent*, hosts online Matalan series *The Show*. "Animal prints go in and out of fashion, but I've always had leopard print in my house. I like texture and colour."

Eddie smiles: "I knew from a few pieces in Denise's wardrobe what to expect. She has a good eye and did a great job.

"I'm definitely interested in design. When we go shopping, I'm always eyeing up furniture. ▶

(LEFT) DENISE'S BLOUSE: GUESS; TROUSERS: THE KOOPLES; BETSY'S BLOUSE AND LEGGINGS: ZARA; NECKLACE: RIVER ISLAND. (RIGHT) DENISE'S JUMPER: TOPSHOP; BETSY'S JUMPER: RIVER ISLAND; EDDIE'S TOP: REISS; BEDS: LIVING IT UP



Showtime

'I never thought I'd have that complete family feeling again. Denise has brought fun and laughter back into my life'



The stylish mini-cinema is a universal hit. The family settle on the sofa (below), ready to enjoy a little movie magic on "Cinema Sunday" – a firm favourite with Betsy



'We haven't ruled out having a baby. Never say never' Eddie

"I'm houseproud, too. We're both obsessive about tidiness – neither of us can sit surrounded by chaos. We're always clearing out drawers and rearranging our wardrobes. I guess if I was a messy person, we'd have problems."

And at 6ft 2in, Eddie is relieved to finally live somewhere with some height after Denise's former cottage, with its low-beamed ceilings. "I'd be covered in bumps and bruises from repeatedly hitting my head," he laughs.

The kitchen, with its vaulted ceilings, is certainly his domain. "I'm pretty much the cook of the house," he says. "Denise loves roasts. If I need to get into her good books, I'll make one with all the trimmings."

Denise admits: "I'm useless at cooking. It's nice to have a man around to do the things I can't. If something breaks, I used to have to ring people, now I just shout: 'Eddie!'"

PICTURE OF FAMILY LIFE

Cosy weekends usually begin with a country walk with six-month-old French bulldog Matilda and end with the trio curling up in the cinema room and eating popcorn in front of a film. But as they settle into family life, would Denise and Eddie ever consider adding a baby to their extended family?

"It's a bit harder to get pregnant when you're older," says Denise, who turns 45 in May. "Besides, having a puppy is a bit like having a new baby in the house."

"I do feel broody," says Eddie. "We haven't ruled out the possibility of having a baby. **H** Never say never."

INTERVIEW: SALLY MORGAN
PHOTOS: JAMES ROBINSON

STYLING: MICHELLE KELLY
HAIR: PAULA CALLAN AT CALLAN & CO
MAKE-UP: NIAMH O'CONNOR

 For behind-the-scenes video from our shoot, visit hellomagazine.com.

The family enjoy a country walk – the perfect start to their weekends together. During the week, Denise is kept busy with her TV work, which includes *Loose Women* (right) and *Ireland's Got Talent*



ADDITIONAL PHOTO: REX FEATURES; DENISE'S COAT: ISAWITFIRST.COM; JEANS: MATALAN; JUMPER: COVE; EDDIE'S JACKET: UNCONDITIONAL; HOME: BETSY'S TOP & TROUSERS: ZARA