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# InStyle

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*on the pressures  
of being  
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White cotton and lace dress, £1,155, by Stella McCartney. Beige silk slip dress, £250, by Rützou. Brown leather belt with stud and coin detail, £154, by J&M Davidson. For stockists, see credits page

# GRACE IN FAVOUR

*Country girl Debra Messing has come a long way since her days on the farm. She's one half of TV's golden couple and the star of hit rom-com 'The Wedding Date', but motherhood's her favourite role now*

By Jenny Cooney Carrillo

Photographed by Mark Liddell. Styled by Cheryl Konteh

**O**n a ranch in the Hollywood Hills, the smell of success is in the air. Okay, so it's more like horse manure, but, here to do *In Style's* cover shoot, *Will & Grace* star Debra Messing seems surprisingly unaffected by the powerful odour.

"I literally grew up next to a farm and used to run next door to watch the horses being born," Messing says cheerfully. "It just tells you how potent your childhood memories are – I'm strangely comforted by the smell of horse poo!"

A few days later, arriving at the rather more chichi garden restaurant of the Chateau Marmont hotel in

another unglamorous confession. "I've been cleaning my closets all morning," she says, with a look of bliss. The Brooklyn-born, Rhode Island-raised and theatre-trained actress is enjoying a three-week break after wrapping another series of *Will & Grace*. Next, she's off to Las Vegas to shoot the drama *Lucky You* with Drew Barrymore. But over iced coffee and salad, she's happy to talk about what's new in her life. There's her first starring role in a film, *The Wedding Date*, in which she plays a woman who hires a male escort (Dermot Mulroney) to pose as her boyfriend when she attends her sister's London wedding. And, of course, there's Roman, her one-year-old son with screenwriter husband Daniel Zelman, and the difficult pregnancy, which meant that for the final four episodes of the last



*'When I first heard that we were shooting with horses in the mountains, I thought we were going for a cowboy theme, but these are the clothes I wish I had in my closet – comfortable, feminine skirts and dresses'*

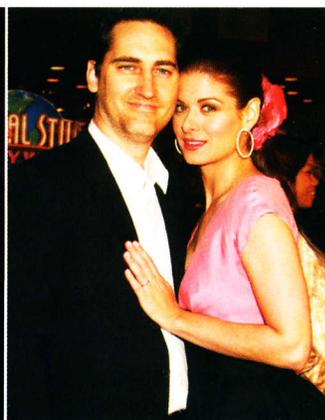
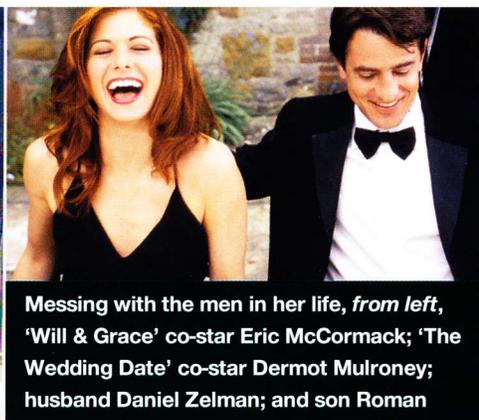
Blue silk-knit vest with ruffle detail, £345, by Moschino. Cream silk embroidered skirt, £8,185; and printed bikini top, £263, both by Roberto Cavalli. Orange canvas sandals, £405, by Christian Louboutin. Brown plaited-leather belt, £18, by Topshop. For stockists, see credits page ▶

**How did you feel about being ordered to have bed-rest while you were filming *Will & Grace*?**

I'm glad the series turned out as well as it did, but it was very challenging. My first priority was this baby and doing whatever my doctor told me, and when you have trouble in your pregnancy, it's a personal, private thing. However, out of necessity, I had to share that information, because 150 other people on the set were affected. Now Grace is back to being a very physically expressive character and I've been thoroughly enjoying it.

**How has motherhood changed your life and marriage?**

I actually think motherhood has saved me from my vanity – and it's a relief. You find out so quickly what is essential. Before I had Roman, I might have spent an hour shopping for make-up. Now, it doesn't even occur to me; if I need something, I order it online at midnight. Even my wardrobe is more about pragmatism and functionality, as you can tell looking at me today. Daniel is such a great father and is madly in love with our son, too. We've been together for so long, it just feels like part of a continuum for us.



Messing with the men in her life, from left, 'Will & Grace' co-star Eric McCormack; 'The Wedding Date' co-star Dermot Mulroney; husband Daniel Zelman; and son Roman

**Were you very into fashion and beauty before?**

I never knew anything about what I call fashion with a capital "F" when I was a young girl. I didn't read fashion magazines or know designers' names, so I wasn't aware of the artistry of it. But I knew that I loved the transforming power of clothes, make-up and hairstyling, so it makes sense that I got into acting, because it's about using those tools to lose yourself in someone else.

**How do you feel about women who go back to wearing size-eight jeans two months after having a baby?**

I didn't understand how that was even possible. I gained 40 pounds [almost 3 stone] and it took a while to come off. I had to let go of that external pressure to get back to the Hollywood ideal of what beauty is. I exercised and ate healthily and dropped the first 25 pounds [almost 2 stone] quickly, but the rest held on for dear life – so I went to a personal trainer who kicked my ass until I thought I was going to die, and then it really came off.

**You've been with your husband, Daniel, for 14 years and been married for almost five; a rarity in Hollywood. What's your secret?**

We met when we were 22, and didn't get engaged for another seven years. I remember all these well-meaning people being very agitated by the fact that we weren't committed, in that official way, to each other. But I always knew that when I found the right guy, I would

married and divorced twice during the course of our seven-year courtship! We've learnt that marriage is not a fairy tale, but something you tend to every day. Nothing comes before it and our family.

**Were you surprised at the success of *Will & Grace*?**

I think our show is hilariously funny, but the unexpected social and political effects that it's had are the things that make me feel most proud. When we first came on the air, Ellen's [DeGeneres] show was just finishing because her character had come out of the closet, so we expected to be pulled off the air. But, right from the start, our four characters were clear about their sexual identity: that two are straight, two are gay. So it became more about us trying to get through life as single people with all the things everybody has to contend with, rather than whether you're gay or straight.

**Not many people know this, but red isn't your natural hair colour – why did you decide to become a redhead?**

When I got my first movie, *A Walk in the Clouds* [with Keanu Reeves], they wanted me to be a redhead. They dyed my hair 13 times and, at the end of it, I was this vibrant redhead. All of a

sudden I was getting jobs that I wasn't being offered prior to that. When I got *Will & Grace*, I told them my hair didn't have to be red, but they said they liked it.

**What's the most important thing you do every day to make you feel good about yourself?**

I take a bath every night. Before, it was by myself and now it's with my son. I love bath stuff, especially Kiehl's, and lots of essential oils.

**You lived in London when you were at university. How did you feel about going back to film *The Wedding Date*?**

I jumped up and down when they told me we were shooting there. I majored in theatre and we had these amazing teachers from RADA, Cambridge and Oxford. It was a very romantic time in my life. It was the first time I realised I could take care of myself. I came back feeling confident, strong and self-sufficient. But also, in terms of my acting, it was a pivotal time, because it taught me that I definitely wanted to do it for a living.

**Would you consider moving to London?**

Absolutely! The architecture is amazing and it was as beautiful as I remembered it. My husband and I turned to each other when we were there and said, "We could so live here." But it's expensive right now – London would have to work on that first. ■

*Will & Grace* is on Channel 5 at 8pm on Friday