



↑ THEN
The size 16 star (in '07) "wasn't weighing or measuring" her food, says *Weight Watchers*' Liz Josefsberg.

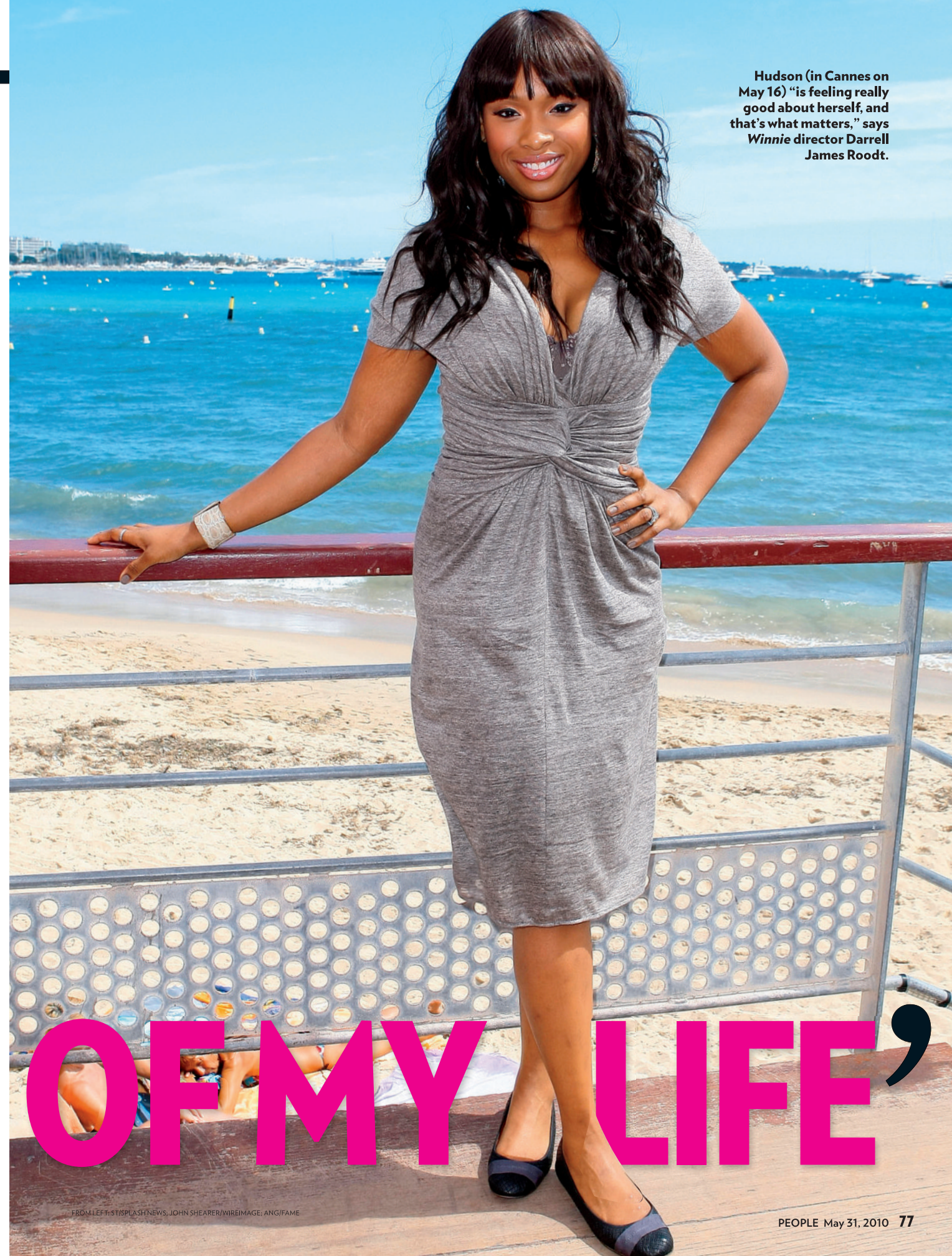


↻ NOW
"I love it," says Hudson of her slimmer silhouette (on display at Terrazza Martini in Cannes May 16).

INSPIRED TO LOSE WEIGHT FOR A ROLE, THE FORMER SIZE 16 STAR DROPS FIVE DRESS SIZES AND NOW FEELS 'SO HAPPY' IN HER NEW BODY

It's the phone call every leading lady dreads: After signing up to play the title role of Winnie Mandela in a biopic back in November, Jennifer Hudson was asked not once, but three times by director Darrell James Roodt to lose weight before filming began. That left the actress—who gave birth to her son David Jr. last August (Dad is WWE wrestler David Otunga, 30)—a solid six months to shed her post-pregnancy pounds. The request "didn't faze me that much," she says, but she tried to temper expectations nevertheless. "She was saying, 'I'm going to do my best, but I can't promise anything,'" recalls Roodt. "Meanwhile, she really went for it. That was amazing."

The same could be said for the results. A size 16 when she made her big-screen debut in 2006's *Dreamgirls*, Hudson told PEOPLE she is "so happy" to show off her newly toned size 6 body at the Cannes International Film Fes-



Hudson (in Cannes on May 16) "is feeling really good about herself, and that's what matters," says *Winnie* director Darrell James Roodt.

Jennifer Hudson 'I'M IN THE BEST SHAPE OF MY LIFE'

JENNIFER'S BODY THROUGH THE YEARS

Hudson's weight has fluctuated for personal and professional reasons since she became famous, but her self-esteem always remained the same.



↑ **Ca. 1999**

"I don't believe in short-cuts or drugs. If I can't lose weight naturally, then no need for me to try at all," she once said.



↑ **2004**

"Some people called me the Big Girl on *Idol*," recalled the former contestant. "But I was a size that made me happy."



↑ **2006**

Hudson ate cookies and cake to gain 20 lbs. for *Dreamgirls*. "I wanted her to be real, so I had to eat like her."



← **2007**

"I like my size, so I try to hold on to it. But I do work out, and I'm a very strict eater," Hudson told *PEOPLE*.



← **2009**

"Confidence is everything. I just don't let people impose their insecurities on me," says Hudson (performing five months pregnant at the Detroit Opera House).

tival this month. "I'm in the best shape of my life!" says Hudson, 28. But the former *American Idol* contestant—who famously gained more than 20 lbs. for her Oscar-winning turn as Effie White—didn't resort to extreme measures. "Whatever it takes to morph into the character, I'll do it," she says. But "I wasn't going to starve myself for anyone." Instead Hudson joined forces with L.A.-based trainer Harley Pasternak in the fall. In January she also signed up to become the celebrity spokeswoman for Weight Watchers. Since then, "she keeps getting tighter and thinner," says Pasternak. "It started off being about *Winnie*, and it ended up being a whole new JHud."

Her transformation started with a

new approach to food. "I've done a lot of diets in the past," says Hudson, who often would eat only grilled chicken and egg whites until she got bored and fell off the weight-loss wagon. "I was restricting myself." Now she's learned how to eat in moderation and enjoy smaller portions of her favorite foods like pizza and sushi. "She was very afraid of carbs," says her Weight Watchers counselor Liz Josefsberg. Now, "I don't get hungry," says Hudson. "I just eat right." She also consistently breaks a sweat. Just four days

after giving birth to David Jr., the new mom started walking for 30 minutes each day before amping up her workout to Pasternak's five-day, 25-min. circuit training regimen. "I'm a cardio maniac!" says Hudson.

Still, there are days Hudson doubts that she can really fit into her new size 6 wardrobe. "In my head, I am still the same weight I was before," she says. "It takes a while to get used to it." Luckily, she has plenty of time to adapt to her new reflection in the mirror. "This is the way I want to be," says Hudson, "and the way I want to stay!"

By Liza Hamm with Monique Jeseen and Dana Kennedy in Cannes and Thailan Pham and Michelle Tan in New York City