

GET A BODY LIKE A GODDESS

Imagine an exercise that could help you correct your posture, heal muscle injuries, increase bone density, ease arthritis and asthma—and even make you look taller! That's Pilates (pronounced Puh-LAH-teez), a series of exercises designed to increase circulation, flexibility and strength. The regimen focuses on building a strong "powerhouse"—the band of muscles around your abs and back—because its proponents believe that every movement should come from the body's center. The routine also involves intense stretching, precise breathing and concentrated attention on keeping the body aligned, the movements coordinated and the mind focused.

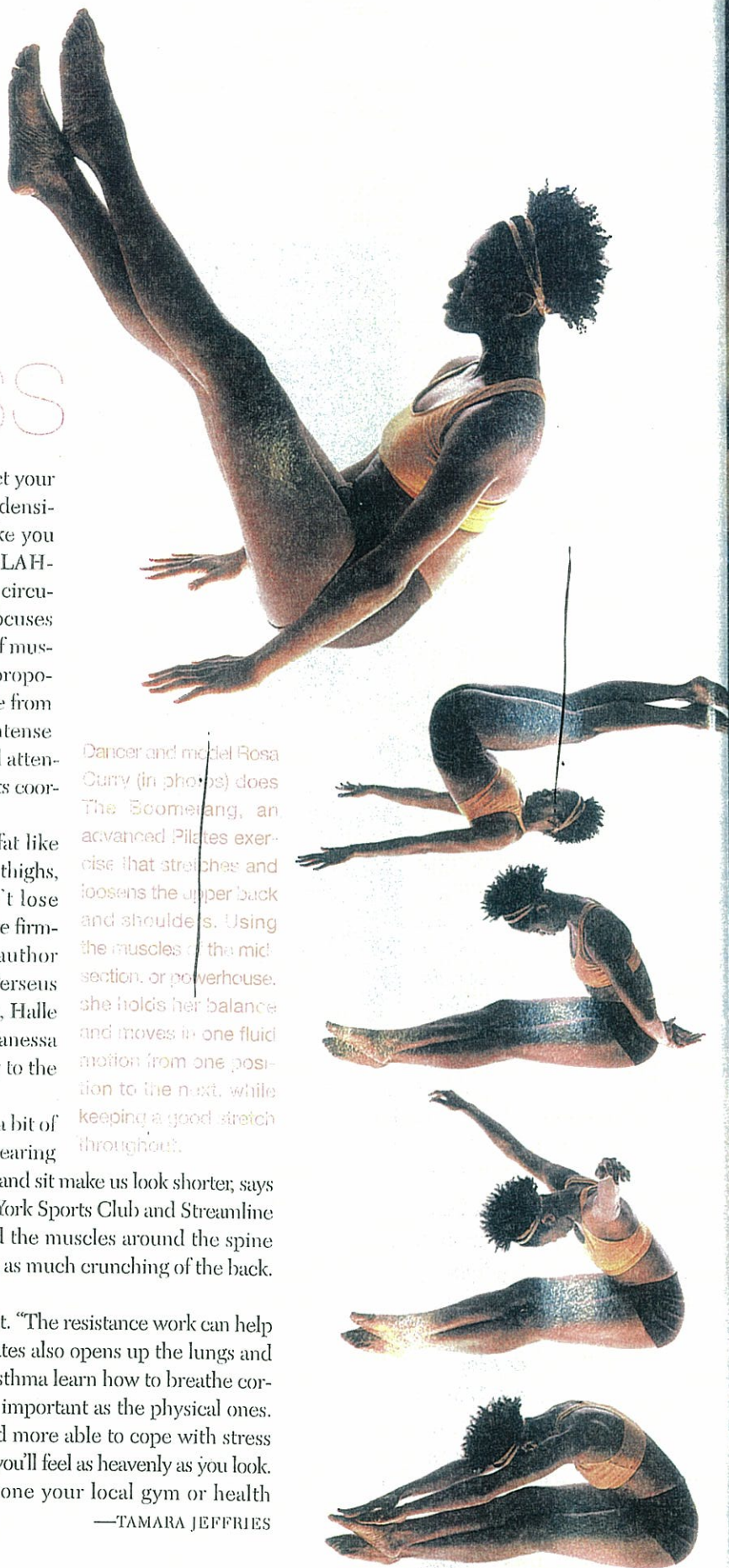
While Pilates's graceful moves won't burn fat like aerobics, practitioners do report leaner hips and thighs, a smaller waist and a firmer look. "You don't lose weight, but you might lose inches" because you're firming muscles, says Pilates guru Mari Winsor, author with Mark Laska of *The Pilates Powerhouse* (Perseus Books). Winsor's clients—including Lela Rochon, Halle Berry, Vanessa L. Williams, Lynn Whitfield, Vanessa Bell Calloway and Jasmine Guy—are testimony to the regimen's body benefits.

As for Pilates making you taller—well, that's a bit of a stretch. Literally. Over time bad habits like wearing heavy shoulder bags and slouching when we walk and sit make us look shorter, says Michelle Fernandez, who teaches Pilates at New York Sports Club and Streamline Studios in New York. "The stronger the abs and the muscles around the spine are, the more support the spine has, so there isn't as much crunching of the back. You'll stand taller."

But a long, lean physique is not the only benefit. "The resistance work can help increase bone density," Fernandez explains. "Pilates also opens up the lungs and diaphragm and stretches the back; people with asthma learn how to breathe correctly." And the mental-health advantages are as important as the physical ones. "Pilates makes you feel better about yourself and more able to cope with stress and the rigors of life," Winsor says. In other words, you'll feel as heavenly as you look.

To locate a Pilates trainer near you, telephone your local gym or health club or dial (800) PILATES.

—TAMARA JEFFRIES



Dancer and model Rosa Curry (in photos) does *The Boomerang*, an advanced Pilates exercise that stretches and loosens the upper back and shoulders. Using the muscles of the midsection, or powerhouse, she holds her balance and moves in one fluid motion from one position to the next, while keeping a good stretch throughout.