

# Dress for Chess: A Design Contest in Saint Louis

**Chess doesn't require any special gear or performance wear, but comfort is key.**

By [David Moin](#) on July 3, 2017

The World Chess Hall of Fame and the Saint Louis Fashion Incubator want to see the grand masters of the game dressed in grand style.

It's a sport typically associated with head-scratching brooding intellectuals in discrete suits and ties, rather than fashion flair. Nevertheless, the six emerging designers participating in the Saint Louis Fashion Incubator have been paired with six chess grand masters to create two chess-inspired garments — a uniform piece and one whimsical piece.

The winning design of the contest, called Pinned! A Designer Chess Challenge, will be revealed Aug. 1 at the Windows on Washington event space in Saint Louis' garment district during the opening ceremonies for the Sinquefeld Cup international chess tournament at the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of Saint Louis. It will also be exhibited starting Oct. 5 at the World Chess Hall of Fame. The winner will receive a \$10,000 cash prize.

Chess grand master Maurice Ashley is on board with the idea. "The creative aspect of this project makes it fun, but the practicality and functionality of the designs will be crucial."

Designer Audra Danielle Noyes of the firm Audra is paired with Ashley. "My design focuses on fusing classic luxury men's wear fabrics with athletic materials and or details," said Noyes. Unlike the stereotype of a professional chess player, "Maurice pushes the boundaries with his personal style," said Noyes. "He always looks polished and refined, yet he takes risks. He doesn't mind a slightly party outfit."

Speaking of the practical needs, "Chess players perspire a ton when they are sitting there," said Susan Sherman, chairperson of the Saint Louis Fashion Fund, which supports the incubator and works to bring back small batch production to the city's once teeming garment district. She sees light fabrics, as well as elbow pads, as integral to the chess uniform.

"The designers and the chess masters have been Skyping, communicating by phone and a couple of our designers have even learned to play chess," Sherman said.

“The grand masters have informed them what’s needed — something functional and visual. This is serious stuff. You can use style to your advantage — to intimidate your opponent.”

“It’s not exactly an action, contact sport but it’s highly stressful, so designing for chess is about comfort and breathable fabrics and a lot of these professional players want to look sharp,” said Timo Weiland, the New York-based designer and creative director, and judge for the contest.

Other emerging designers of the incubator, which provides stipends, free studio space, sales support and mentors in a two-year residency, are Agnes Hamerlik, Allison Mitchell, Charles Smith 2nd, Reuben Reuel and Emily Brady Koplak. They’re paired with grand masters Alejandro Ramírez, Fabiano Caruana, Cristian Chirila, Nazí Paikidze-Barnes and Jennifer Shahade, respectively.

Aside from Weiland, the judges are Dr. Hazel Clark, research chair of fashion and professor of design and fashion studies at Parsons School of Design; Macy’s director of global forecasting Abbey Samet; St. Louis Post-Dispatch fashion editor Debra Bass, and chess grand master Eric Hansen.