

**CORDWAINERS
FOOTWEAR AWARDS
DESIGN
2026**



INTRODUCTION

The Cordwainers Footwear Awards were launched in 2014 to support the future of the footwear industry and to celebrate the very best in student footwear design. The design awards competition is open to undergraduate and master's students, studying at UK universities or colleges and also, to aspiring footwear designers who are not in full-time education.

The Worshipful Company of Cordwainers is an inclusive organization and welcomes submissions from students of all backgrounds, faiths, and cultures.

Entrants are asked to produce an innovative and marketable shoe design supported by a body of creative and thoughtful visual research. Any type of footwear may be included, and product genre can be womenswear, menswear or childrenswear. All submissions should reflect UN goals for sustainability.

The awards will be presented at a ceremony in London on 11 June 2026.

*PRIZES – 2026

Each prize winner will receive a personal mentoring session, and in addition, cash prizes are as follows:

- First Prize £3000
- Second Prize £2000
- Third Prize £1000
- Sustainability Prize £1500
- The Stuart Weitzman Creativity Prize £1500
- The Daniel Charkow Emerging Sole Award £1500
- Up to two commendations £500 each

*Participants will be eligible for more than one award and all those from the final 15 who are unplaced will receive £100.

COMPETITION RULES - **NEW**

All entrants are asked to submit a maximum three-minute video 'elevator' pitch which introduces the student by name and which encompasses - in brief - the focus of their footwear collection, the research they have undertaken and the passion and principles behind their design concept. This must be sent via [We Transfer](#). Please email us at office@cordwainers.org so that we can check your entry has been received.

The entrants may either talk to camera in the elevator pitch or may choose to talk about their work while filming it. Entrants may post their work on social media once they have submitted their elevator pitch, but they must tag the Cordwainers and must use the entrants' logo (which will be emailed to the entrant on receipt of the elevator pitch) in all posts.

These short storyboard videos will be assessed at a pre-judging session and from these 15 finalists will be chosen, who will then be asked to submit their entry in hard copy. Please do not send a hard copy submission unless notified by the Cordwainers.

FIFTEEN FINALISTS

The final hard copy submission must contain the following elements and, in combination, must not exceed 60 pages:

1. Storyboard

- A one-page storyboard that covers the same material as the three-minute elevator pitch that was submitted for the initial judging.

2. Research

- Consisting of an A4 or A3 sketchbook to include inspirational imagery and primary and secondary research to support the concept. Hand-drawn design development is especially welcomed. All use of images (including AI) **must** be properly credited.

3. Portfolio/presentation pack

- A4 or A3
- A maximum 200-word paragraph explaining the design philosophy and rationale, to be presented in a creative and imaginative format to support the final submission.

- Consumer profile
- Colour palette and materials board (which should consider material types including sustainable materials where appropriate, experiments, treatments, laser cutting etc.)
- Development and design development pages which will include design development, final presentation sheets with finished product ideas which should include CAD visuals (these should illustrate the design features of the shoe, side view, sole, sole unit, heel, trims, materials etc.), and a technical specification sheet for the final design proposal
- Finalists are asked to highlight **one** final footwear design from their presentation sheets, picked out as the final design proposal for making into a commercial product. **Please note, the requirement is for a visual, not a prototype.**
- Finalists are encouraged to showcase an understanding of using 2D to create 3D and eventually tooling, as this process is a large investment for any business.

4. Biography

- A 100/200-word biography that sums up the finalist's aesthetic and approach. We need to know why you are passionate about footwear!
- A JPEG portrait photograph (1-2 MB) (**PDFs will not be accepted**)
- Up-to-date contact information – email, Instagram accounts etc. Please note that the finalists are likely to be contacted by press.

5. Sustainability Prize

- To be eligible for the Sustainability Prize the design must demonstrate real innovation in sustainability, and commitment to the United Nations' goals for sustainable development. More information can be found at:
https://sdgs.un.org/#goal_section

6. The Stuart Weitzman Creativity Prize (New for 2026)

- To be eligible for the Stuart Weitzman Creativity Prize the design and concept must represent creative forward thinking and innovation, whilst also considering the performance, comfort and style for which Stuart Weitzman is renowned. You can find out more about Stuart's life and work here:
<https://tinyurl.com/mrykhd42>

7. The Daniel Charkow Emerging Sole Award (New for 2026)

- The Daniel Charkow Emerging Sole Award is open to entrants of both the design award competition **and** the Craft of Shoemaking award*. The judging panels for the design awards and the Craft of Shoemaking Award will nominate three design finalists and three craft finalists to be put forward for consideration.
- Applicants are invited to explore Daniel's body of work, his philosophy and his dedication to the craft of shoemaking at: [@shoe_man_dan](https://virtualshoemuseum.com/daniel-charkow/) and <https://virtualshoemuseum.com/daniel-charkow/>
- If you would like to be considered for this award, please include in your submission video an additional 30 seconds explaining what it is about shoe design and making that excites and inspires you, reflecting on Daniel's principles of design and craftsmanship.
- The recipient of the award will be chosen by the Charkow family and will be the shoe designer/craftsperson who, in their opinion, best exemplifies Daniel's skill, innovation and unique talent.
- See Annex A for further details.

NOTES FOR TUTORS

- Universities must select entrants who meet the full criteria as set out in the competition brief. There is no restriction on the number of entrants from any given institution.
- Universities are responsible for ensuring that all entries are appropriately submitted. Competition submissions must **clearly** display the name of the student, and their university, and must have a title and description to be used consistently in any communication during the competition.
- Please note that we will require a minimum of five high quality **JPEG images** of the students' footwear designs (minimum Resolution 1-2MB). These images may be used in advance press releases, publications and on social media. Please note that **PDF images are not acceptable**. Entries that do not include the requisite number of JPEG images will not be included in the final judging session.
- All finalists and their tutors will be invited to attend the awards ceremony in London on 11 June 2026.

- All entrants to the competition will be issued with a distinctive Cordwainer logo which must be used on social media, websites, and printed materials, subject to the branding guidelines issued by the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers.
- All finalists will be issued with a finalist's logo which must be used on social media, websites, and printed materials, subject to the branding guidelines issued by the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers.
- The First Prize winner will be issued with a distinctive winner's logo which must be used on social media, websites, and printed materials, subject to the branding guidelines issued by the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers.
- *The Craft of Shoemaking Award is administered by Carréducker under separate application. Footwear students may enter for both the design awards and the Craft of Shoemaking Award. For more information, please contact Carréducker: <https://www.carreducker.com/>

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- By entering the competition, entrants agree and acknowledge that the work submitted may be used in press releases/publications/social media by and on behalf of the organizer (the Worshipful Company of Cordwainers). A copy of the First Prize winner's work may form part of the 'Cordwainers' Collection' at Northampton Museum and Art Gallery and/or be put on display by the Cordwainers' Company.

KEY DATES

13 April 2026 - Deadline for submission of short video elevator pitch
 15 April 2026 – Pre-judging of the elevator pitches
 17 April 2026 – Candidates notified of the final 15 shortlist
 27 April 2026 - Deadline for receipt of finalists' hard copy submissions
 30 April 2026 – FINAL JUDGING
 11 June 2026 – The Cordwainers Footwear Awards

ANNEX A

The Daniel Charkow Emerging Sole Award

- The Daniel Charkow Emerging Sole Award launches in 2025-2026 to celebrate the legacy of Daniel Charkow.
- Daniel was a young, visionary shoe designer and prolific skilled shoemaker whose creativity, curiosity, and inventive use of materials reflected a deep respect for craftsmanship.
- Daniel graduated from the BA Cordwainers Footwear course at London College of Fashion in 2023 with a First and won both the Cordwainers' Jimmy Choo award and the Cordwainers' Cup for Excellence. He handmade shoes for private clients and major fashion week shows and was a member of world-renowned shoe designer Sophia Webster's team. Tragically, Daniel passed away in 2024.
- This inaugural award will recognise a rising talent in shoe design and/or making who embodies the qualities that defined Daniel's work and carries forward the values Daniel championed – creative courage, meticulous craft, and a deep respect for the art of shoemaking.
- Applicants are invited to explore Daniel's body of work, his philosophy, and his dedication to the craft of shoemaking: [@shoe_man_dan](#) and <https://virtualshoemuseum.com/daniel-charkow/>
- If you would like to be considered for this award, please include in your submission video/written statement an additional 30 seconds/250 words explaining what it is about shoe design and making that excites and inspires you, reflecting on Daniel's principles of design and craftsmanship.

Instagram: [@worshipfulcordwainers](#)

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-worshipful-company-of-cordwainers/>

Website: <https://cordwainers.org/>