

Fashionistas



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The 30 contestants of the fourth annual Project Fabricland fashion show pose with Stephen "Suede" Baum, a semifinalist from the fifth season of "Project Runway."

Basking Ridge teen wins best-in-show and Westfield girl takes home first place at Project Fabricland

By **JEFF WEBER**
STAFF WRITER

At 18, Amanda Friedman is a veteran when it comes to sewing, having started in the fifth grade.

Margaux Natiello, on the other hand, is 11 and has been honing the bobbin and thread only since November.

But both girls knocked the socks off of the judges — and a special celebrity guest — in the fourth annual Project Fabricland "Make It Picturesque" Fashion Show on May 2 at North Plainfield High School.

Friedman, a senior at Ridge High School, won the inaugural best-in-show award for her white satin halter gown with hand-painted watercolor geometric designs on the skirt. Friedman, who will study fashion design at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in the fall, had a feeling she would do well.

"I was thinking I'd be in the top three," said Friedman, par-

ticipating in her fourth Project Fabricland event after finishing third in her first year, first in her second and winning the best design board award last year. "But I had no idea I'd win best-in-show."

Friedman is a big fan of surrealism and originally wanted to incorporate the concepts of Salvadore Dali into her design, but it proved too difficult. Instead, she went with Chuck Close, legendary for his "photo-realist" paintings.

"I'm really into fine arts and really know my artists," said Friedman, who spent more than 60 hours painting the Close-esque designs onto the skirt.



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Margaux Natiello, 11, of Westfield won first place in the 10-to-13-year-old division at Project Fabricland.

"The sewing part was easy, but I had never painted fabric before. Now I'm going to wear it to prom, and no one else is going to have a hand-painted dress, so that is special, too."

Natiello also might be heading to college after her performance

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Amanda Friedman, 18, of Ridge High School reacts after winning best-in-show at the fourth annual Project Fabricland fashion show on May 2 in North Plainfield.

Project

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in the event. Her first-place finish in the 10-to-13-year-old division, which featured nine of the contest's 30 participants, could enable her to take classes this summer at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City.

But for now, all Natiello is concerned about is basking in the glow of her dress, which was inspired by the "bright swirls of color" in Vincent Van Gogh's famous "Starry Night" painting.

"I was so happy (to win) because I put a lot of work into it. It feels good that all that hard work paid off," said Natiello, who lives in Westfield and attends Roosevelt Intermedi-

ate School. "I learned a lot about technique and the construction of sewing during the 12 or 14 days it took to make the dress."

Friedman and Natiello certainly opened the eyes of Stephen "Suede" Baum, a semifinalist on the fifth season of "Project Runway," the popular television show from which Project Fabricland gets its name and inspiration.

Baum, who was mobbed for autographs and pictures by the throng of teenage girls in attendance before and after the event, believes many of these girls — particularly Friedman — have a legitimate shot at making it big someday.

"I am amazingly impressed — shocked — to think that these kids are not even in college and could be entering the work force. They could

give some college kids a run for their money," said Baum, who loved the intricacy of the hand-painted designs on Friedman's silk dress. "You can't learn creativity, either you have it or you don't. Learning to sew outside of their comfort zone was probably the most challenging thing they had to do, and if they can be a sponge and learn as much as they can, there is a lot of money to be made in fashion."

Also taking home first-place honors were Samantha Squeri of New Providence in the 14-year-old group and Grace Entwistle, 15, of Summit in the 15-to-18-year-old group. Squeri's design was a floral dress with yellow bodice and contrasting sash, topped with a purple jacket, while Entwistle

crafted a khaki tulip skirt teamed with a green men's shirt.

The contest was the culmination of a 12-week course administered in the three age groups by Fabricland teachers Nancy Plominski, Kim Rhodes and Chris Gonch.

The judges included Sally Miller, a nationally renowned designer of kids fashions; Kathy Marrone, editor-in-chief of Vogue Pattern Magazine, and June Mellinger, director of product promotion and education for Brother Sewing Machines, which donated the prize awarded to Friedman — a Brother Innov-is 40 sewing machine.

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