

ILLUMINATING CHESS

A Photobook by Fred Lucas on the World of Chess

Voor mijn lieve Ineke

Fred Lucas has a special way of capturing chess through his photos, showing the emotions and intensity of the game like no one else.
His memorable portraits and various other images truly bring out the heart of chess and its players.

I remember a conversation we had at an Italian restaurant in Wijk aan Zee years ago when I told him how sad I was that he had quit. That feeling has stayed with me since then.

There have been many skilled photographers in the chess world, but Fred's unique style and attention to detail stand out. His timeless photos keep inspiring chess fans and photography lovers, showing his lasting vision and passion.

Anish Giri

I think Fred Lucas has captured many important and beautiful moments in chess history.
I really appreciate his work.

Magnus Carlsen

Preface

Chess has fascinated people for centuries. But what exactly is chess? Is it a sport, a science, or art? Well, people think differently about that. Some Grandmasters may say it's a sport, while others think it's an art. Despite the individual nature of the game, I myself have always found it striking that chess is also a social activity.

Nowadays, chess is regularly played at the internet, but still more often in social settings such as clubs, tournaments and cafes, making it a unique activity for people of all ages and backgrounds.

At the Olympiad chess players from different countries find common ground because chess has its own international language of pieces, moves and rules.
Even in a park, chess can create connections between strangers as they engage in a game together.

Just as chess I think also photos have the power to connect people across time and distance. Photos capture moments and emotions that transcend language and cultural barriers.
They preserve memories and remind us of the beauty and diversity of our world.

I also believe that in today's digital age a physical photo book still has the ability to foster a sense of belonging.

It was actually clubmate and journalist Kees Volkers who encouraged me more than once to make a chess photo book.

After a while I decided to consult my chess archive. Sifting through my files I realized I wanted to rescue at least a number of photos from obscurity.

A part of these photos are in the book.

If I had to do that again, the collection probably consists of other photos.

The photography of chess players presents challenges.

The basic scene is not a moving subject. It is not tennis or soccer. In chess they move differently.

An experienced press photographer once told me that before the Tata Chess tournament he had to look at my photos every year again to see how it was done, to get into it.

It definitely helps if you know something about the game yourself so you can feel moments coming.

But chess is no exception in photography, so it is almost always better to consider the lighting and composition of the shot.

Fred Lucas

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Focus

Maintaining concentration despite distractions is a key component of problem-solving and decision-making for chess players.

Any distraction can disrupt concentration. However, I also recall Anatoly Karpov playing in the only match that was still in progress. People in the hall were quiet. Suddenly, a young child ran past the stage screaming. The mother panicked, but Anatoly was not startled; he looked unruffled and leaned back towards the chessboard. He won the game.

I once asked the soccer player Edgar Davids what interested him about chess players.

"Focus," was his answer.

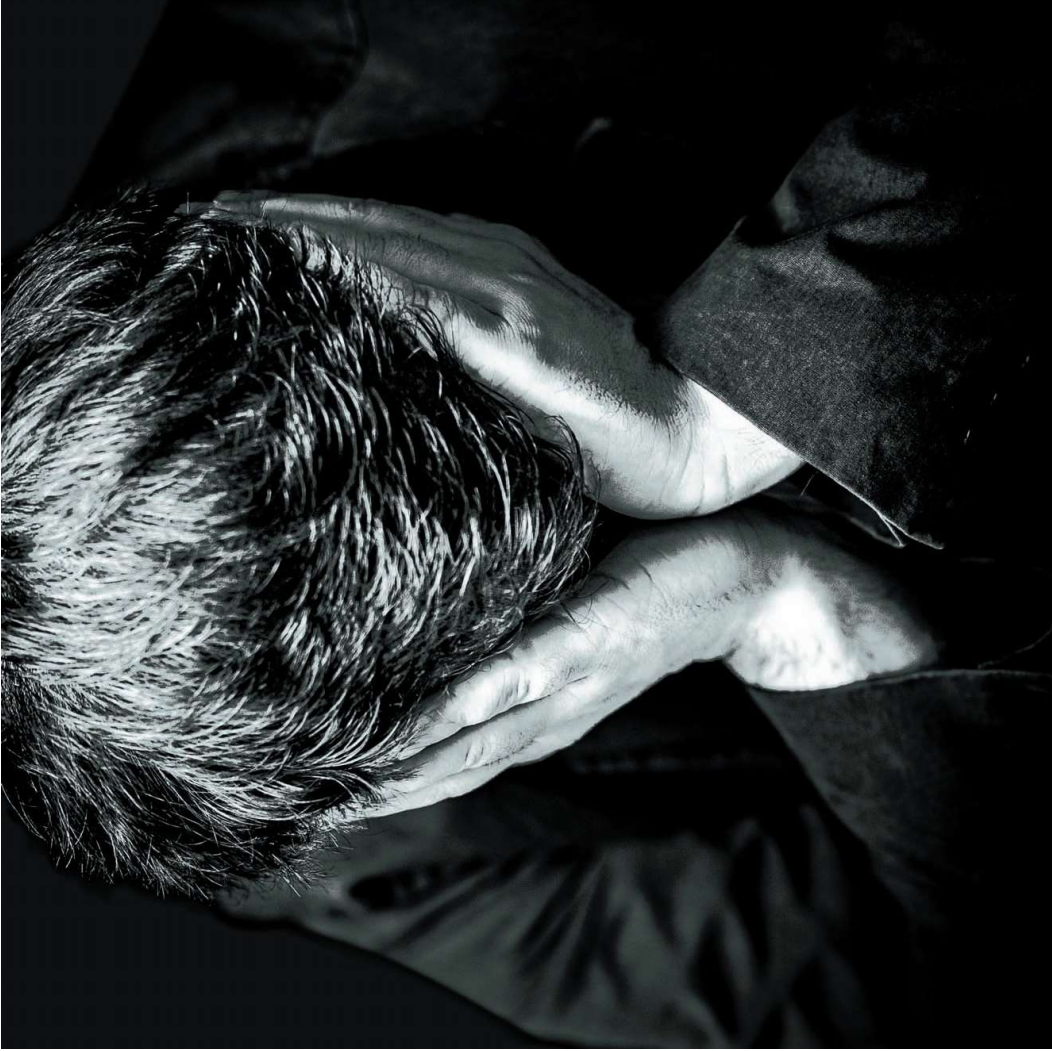
"In football, you can sometimes let it go, but in chess that is fatal. I admire that these players can hold that focus for hours."



Jan Timman, Wijk aan Zee 2004.



Alexander Grischuk, Bilbao 2009.



Shakhriyar Mamedyarov, London 2012.

Alexander
Grischuk,
Bilbao 2009.



Two years earlier, in 2006, I wanted to photograph Alexander after his game that ended in a draw.

In the room I had a chess board and he immediately set up the position where he should have done better. He showed me the position and demonstrated the variations. New variations again and again. He was still focused, you could say.

After about 20 minutes, he was ready to let it go and sit for a portrait.

Alexander
Beljavsky,
Dresden 2008



Focus can be difficult with a photographer standing in front of you with a big lens.

Shirov played inside the glass space in Bilbao. I was outside, but Alexei made sure with a disapproving glare I understood that he did not like that lens.

In this sport it is important to respect the players' needs. Not always though.

There was a GM who did not want to be photographed, not even before the game had started. The sponsor, who also paid the chess player, naturally wanted pictures, including him, so escaping from the camera was not possible.

He didn't like it, but a few days later I sat with him at a sponsor dinner table and mentioned our 'battle'. He didn't seem to mind at all. "You know how we chess players are," was his response. Later on he cooperated for a photo shoot. They were good photos, but not included in this book.

Simul Garry Kasparov

Kasparov is one of the most respected and admired chess players in the world, both for his chess achievements and his contributions to the game.

He was a fierce competitor even in simulx (a chess exhibition where a single player plays against multiple opponents).

In Brussels in the 1980s during a SWIFT activity I saw him jumping back and forth for four boards in a clock simul. He did it so fanatically that Jan Timman, who was busy with his own simul elsewhere, came over for a moment to watch that performance.

In 2009 in Zürich, Garry still had the same focus. I don't know if you've ever seen the behavior of lions at feeding time in the zoo. Similarly, Kasparov stormed into the chess arena. During the simul, while he was in the middle of playing, he was fiercely indignant when he was interrupted and asked for a signature.



Impressive, isn't it, that man at your table.
Garry Kasparov, Zürich 2009.

Zürich 2009.
Kasperov in the middle
of the train station hall.





Garry Kasparov,
Zürich 2009

Garry Kasparov,
Zürich 2009.

