



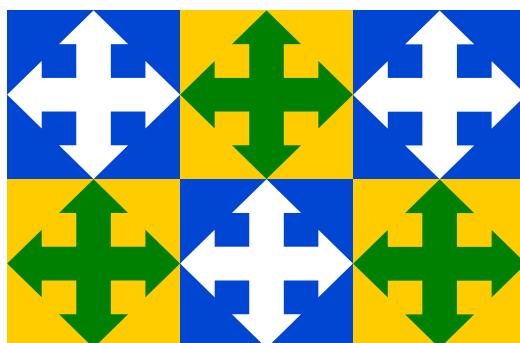
Raising the Standard: An Argument from Design

Tony Burton

Abstract

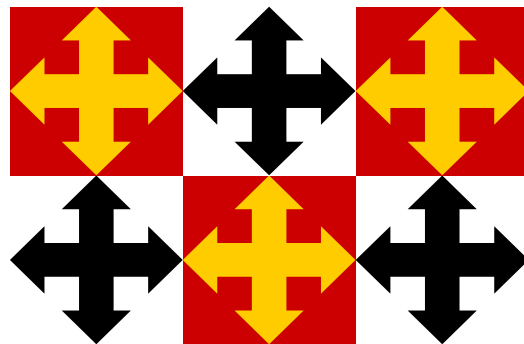
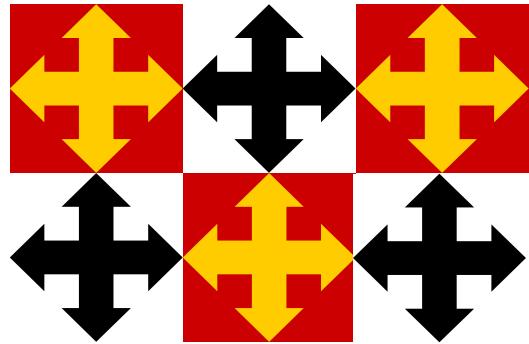
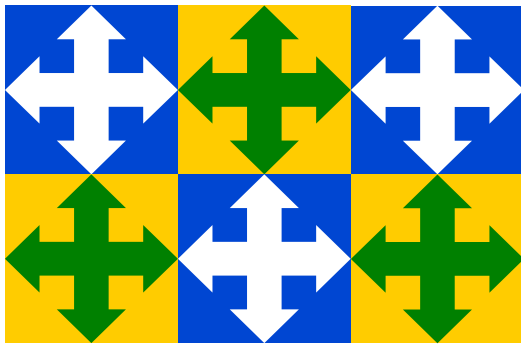
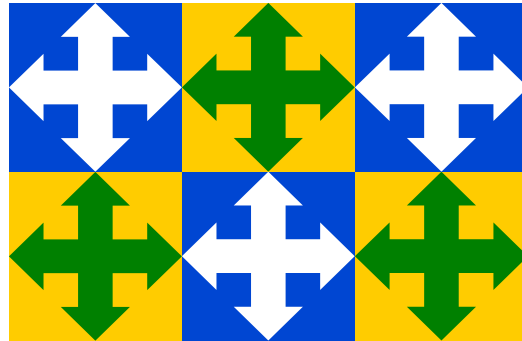
The creative process and principles informing the design of some special purpose and other flags lead to conclusions for flag design in general. The dynamics of metaphor and shape-shifting are considered. The scope for greater pageantry and innovation in flag design is explored. Current national flags of complex or awkward design present a challenge. Possible remedies are suggested.

To paraphrase a famous utterance, the known delivers the unknown, and as at least one national flag of recent vintage demonstrates, the unknown can lead to an unforeseen, but serendipitous result. Among the many instances of how not to design a flag, how to is more worthwhile. Vexillologists have higher standards.



**RAISING
THE
STANDARD:
AN ARGUMENT
FROM DESIGN**

Tony
Burton
Flags
Australia



RAISING THE STANDARD: AN ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

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RAISING THE STANDARD: AN ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

Flags have evolved in many ways from the medieval models paraphrased in the title slide—and not always with their clarity and flair. Imagine the flags of Mozambique, or Turkmenistan, uncluttered. (**Figure 1**)

In raising their standards, modern flag designers should not forget that an effective flag is more than its design. An effective flag touches the hearts and minds of those for whom it was devised, and of those who see it. A well-designed flag can enhance this impact. A flag that is bold and clear elicits a response. Depending on other factors, it will be a positive response.

SCOPE

The heraldic and vexillographic principles of colour and line, stylising, and precedence are well known to a gathering of this kind, and are summarized in **Good Flag, Bad Flag**.¹ The intent here is to amplify that advice, to illustrate how various design principles and techniques create flags that are simple and bold, and to offer insight into the process between the design commissioned and the design delivered.

As examples, this paper considers several flags—some actually in use, others potentially or imagined, including evolutionary, revolutionary design approaches. All offer insight into the creative process. I end with some observations on what I call the Eureka moment.

On the way, this paper also reflects on what flags are really for, in the hope that this leads to a deeper appreciation of vexillology as more than an exotic hobby or the quaint obsession that it is too often perceived to be.

FLAG DESIGN REALITIES

Flags are foremost expressions of, and by, symbols. A flag is not a literal landscape painting.

Symbols come from a realm all of their own. They are both shorthand and metaphor. Even when expressions of a particular culture, symbols have an existential and ontological dimension. Some of them are archetypes—as pictograms, such as the *kanaga* on the 1959 flag of Mali, or the X of Vitruvian man. They are reflections of who and what we think we are. Another case in point might be the *rushnik* on the flag of Belarus. (**Figure 2**) There is a primal naturism implied in its stylised flower pattern. Flags and their crafting are one of the arts that take us beyond the mundane and routine.

The challenge for flag designers is to use symbols to raise the standard of flag design to a factor of “wow”. That is an art. It is not magic, though a well-designed flag, like all beauty, works its own magic.

How to get to that point? That is the science in the art of vexillographics. To paraphrase William of Ockham: why look for angels in the wings—or clutter in design?² If one cause is enough for the cosmos, in flag design, as I hope to illustrate, there can be layers of meaning in a single symbol. Less is more.

GUIDELINES

Three guidelines stand out:

- The designer's first and last task is to consider the stakeholders. These include the designer and respect for the skill commissioned, but the client is the most important in what lines are drawn, what symbols employed to make an interesting, relevant and attractive flag. In the end it is the client who owns the flag and identifies with it. The kudos of a design is transferred to the client—if the product is a good one, and derision and disuse, if not. Designing a flag is not about the aspirations of the designer as much as about the pride and pleasure of the client (unless the client is Julius II).³
- If the client has a symbol already, start there. Research its background. Explore, and explain its limits when applied to flags (yellow on white?), develop, adapt. As necessary, stylize or simplify.
- Thirdly, the fail-safe question, essential to all strategic planning: Is there anything else? The winning design of the Sydney Opera House was found in the discards. The Canadian flag was not in the Committee room, but in essence already on a flag pole.

CONGRESS FLAGS

To see these principles applied, where better to start than with the star-spangled banner of this Congress? (**Figure 3**)

Figure 4 shows the flag symbols of the stakeholders. Each has some aspect that might suggest a derivative design—in this case colours and symbols in common.

Then the question: Was there anything else? Yes, there was. The 24th Congress earned its place partly on the strength of flag sites in the capital across the Potomac, and in the two adjacent states—Virginia and Maryland, each with its own flag.

From George Washington's arms, the stars of the **District of Columbia** evoke those of the host nation's flag. **Virginia** has a blue flag and doing her duty, a dominatrix dishevelled. The flag of **Maryland**, majestic among all US State flags, suggested the format of similar but simpler pageantry, based on the canton of the US flag: if 50 states can each have a star, 24 Congresses also can, six a quarter.



Figure 1

Figure 2

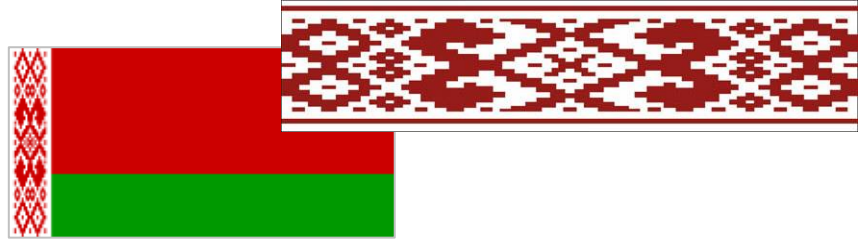
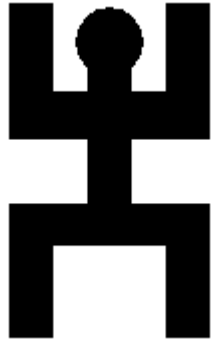


Figure 3

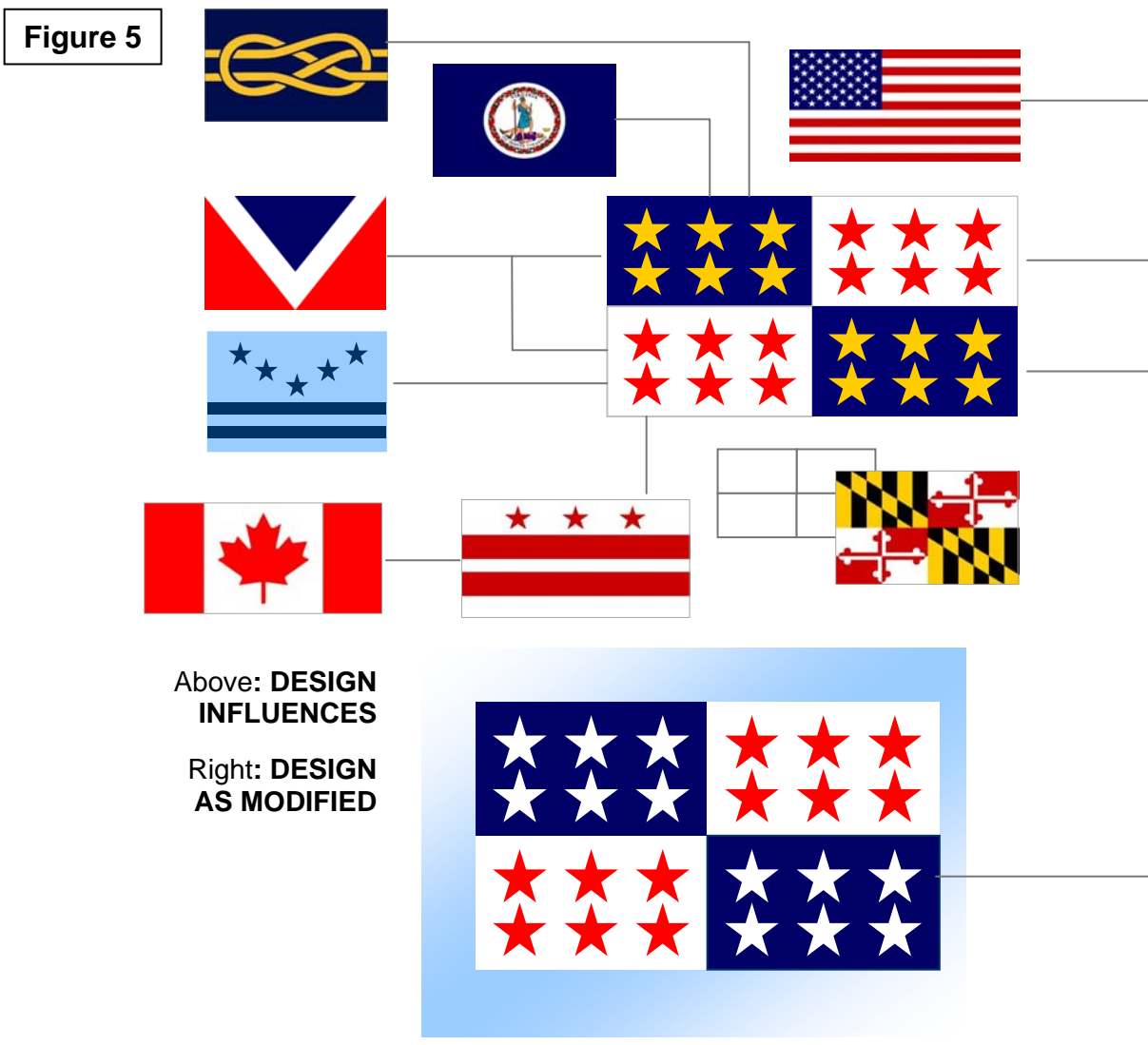


FIAV the overall sponsor of Congresses
The local host organisations:
NAVA (left) and the Chesapeake Bay Flag
Association (right), and implied in the
name North American Vexillological
Association, three national flags.

Figure 4



That perception may have been the Eureka moment. Risking appeal to jingoism, a clear economy of design for a Congress flag began to emerge. **Economy of symbols is a key facet of design.** Avoid adding symbol after symbol if fewer, or ideally, one, can express the many. Ockham's Razor again. There are exceptions, but in this case symbolic aspects of eight flags coalesced in a field of stars quartered, coloured in counterpoint⁴—blue and gold for a FIAV event; blue and red and white for the Americana. **(Figure 5)** However there is more to creative design than mere association.



Other design criteria and techniques are illustrated in further examples of Congress flags.

Function is paramount in flag design. Devices are best placed in the centre or closer to the hoist as the fly end wears out first. **(Figure 6)**

Even so, effective design doesn't have to be based solely on the four-sided, two-dimensional frame—even if the result is expressed within such a four-sided canvas. If what is already known can provide ideas for a new flag design, there are also different and unforeseen ways of representing what has either been taken for granted, or not even imagined. **(Figure 7)**

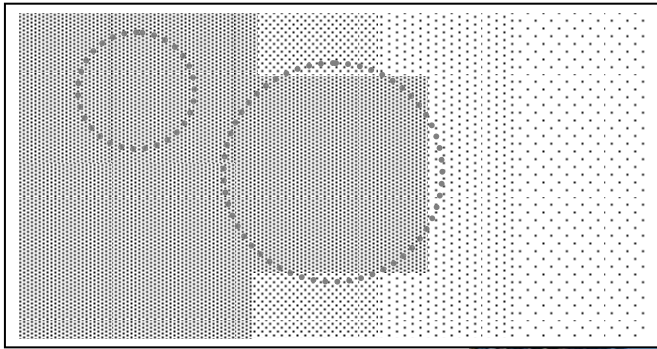


Figure 6

THE QUADRANGLE OF FLAG DESIGN

Hoist and centre, the prime zones in flag design: the fly end wears out first.

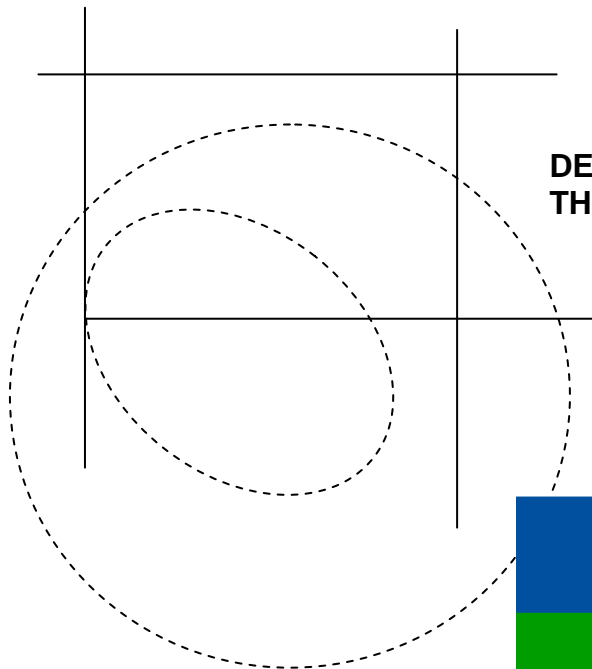
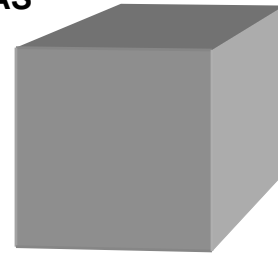


Figure 7

DESIGN FROM BEYOND THE CANVAS



This flexibility is evident in another design planned for ICV24. Inspired by the NAVA flag, it also uses the colours of the host nation, city and of FIAV. **(Figure 8)** Its signal feature is an Escher-effect. Short of a hologram, this is as close as flat graphics get to the 3-dimensional.



Figure 8

PROPOSAL FOR FLAG OF ICV 24 ALEXANDRIA VIRGINIA 2011

The NAVA flag deconstructed (as it was for the last ICV held in the US in 1987) forming V for Vexillology, V for Virginia (a double V for Washington? and for those who want to see it, the wings of the American Eagle), and to include the blue and gold livery of FIAV.

Photo: Australian-American Memorial, Canberra



Figure 9

However, it did not convey that the Washington Congress is the 24th. Its quiriness on the other hand goes to show that there is always scope for the unexpected. Flags were once items of ornate heraldry adding splendour and pageantry to a monarch's court. Most national flags, at least, are today comparatively simple geometries, utilitarian, mass produced.

What form will flags take in the future?

One future flag, the ceremonial banner of ICV26 in Sydney in 2015, blends heraldry and geometry to bring a sense of pageantry.

The host Flag Society of Australia deliberated over various concepts, suggestions, and designs to get to this point.

Departing from previous ICV convention, the ICV26 Committee determined that it needed a flat logo for general Congress use and publicity that could be adapted to a flag and a badge, rather than a flag used as a logo.⁵

This perspective has produced an unusual graphic. It is the result of not a few compromises—always the risk (and opportunity) if designs are debated by Committee.

The design (**Figure 9**) is a composite of the Congress logo over a simpler background of the Harbour Bridge doubling as a bridge between vexillologists. As such, it runs counter to some of the graphical remedies and recommendations in the further part of this paper. Which again goes to show that flag designers can be flexible.

Its several layers of meaning are explained in **Appendix A** to this paper. Suffice here to make some general observations on the opportunities it suggests for vexillography, particularly in its use of shape-shifting.

SHAPE-SHIFTING

Shape-shifting is a design tool whereby part of one symbol is part of another—adding to economy in design. The technique is illustrated in the stunning flag of the 8th ICV, (**Figure 10**), the numeral integrated within an outline of Stephansdom, the chief landmark of the Austrian capital. This design strongly influenced the ICV26 emblem; the human figure merges with the Southern stars and the numerals against the archway of Sydney's dominant icon.

Whatever their design, flags themselves are shape-shifters and this should determine their graphic style. Their play of light and colour undulating in the breeze, and enigmatic folds at rest are part of the conjuring flags should be designed to deliver. Flags are more than signals. As kinetic expressions of ideas, they are meant to seduce—and so their frequent use as the props in propaganda.

As general acceptance of Canada's flag illustrates, a good design can win the day over a mediocre proposal and challenge partisans to see things differently. As the silences in music are as important as its cadences, analogously a visual image can exist in the negative,

expressed graphically as a void, and supplement the symbolism of its positive. Again, consider the Canadian flag. The Maple Leaf unites what its negative seems to suggest: bilingual communities, with long noses and long memories contemplating what they have in common. Take care in what you design for: you may get what you wish for. (Figure 11)

DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN NATIONAL FLAGS

Seeing things differently can also be discerned in the designs of national flags—actual, potential, and experimental. The first category includes the flags of **Canada, Bangladesh, Suriname, and South Africa.**

The history of the **CANADIAN** flag (Figure 12) is detailed in Matheson's **Canada's Flag: A Search for a Country** and summarised in **Appendix B.** Suffice here that the red and white Maple Leaf adopted in 1965 is Canada's first official national flag, after making do with the Union Jack and different versions of a "temporary" red ensign from 1892.⁶

Getting such a symbol right mattered. The *right* symbols mattered. The Eureka moment in the process seemed to come with Col. George Stanley's suggestion of a viable model in the flag of the Royal Military College—graphically tidier than, and thus superior to, the politically controversial blue, white and red "Pearson Pennant". Its derivative with just one Maple Leaf was supported by the opposition, and "unexpectedly" by the Pearson camp. A unanimous choice, the flag was a revolutionary design that managed to be seen as evolutionary.

In the Canadian story are many elements of successful flag design:

- thinking outside the square—the Canadian Pale;
- one symbol doing duty for many;
- less conveying more;
- continuity: something new made from something old.

The flag changed. Canada still stretches "from sea to sea", from the red sunrise to the red sunset. Australian flag-designers can take heart: if the flag Down Under changed, the sun will still rise and set from the Pacific to Indian Oceans.

Changes to the flag of **BANGLADESH** also shows that less is sufficient and can even be more. (Figure 13)

The flag was first raised in March 1971 after it became clear that East Pakistan was set to secede but would have to fight for its independence. The flag originally included a solid map in gold, allegedly at the insistence of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who feared that Bengali nationalist feeling might spread to West Bengal, part of India after the partition of 1947. Gandhi wanted to ensure that the Bangla nation in question was understood as the east wing of Pakistan, not a province of India.⁷

In 1972, the complex map was removed, and the disk moved slightly toward the hoist. The real inspiration as far as design is concerned was the realisation, once Bangladesh had been solidly established, that the plain circle was sufficient to symbolise several things—the country itself and the high cost of its independence. Less says more.



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

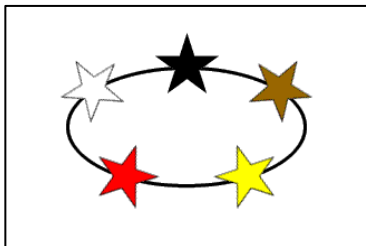
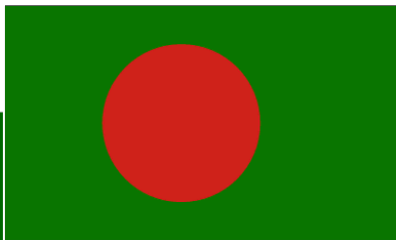


Figure 14

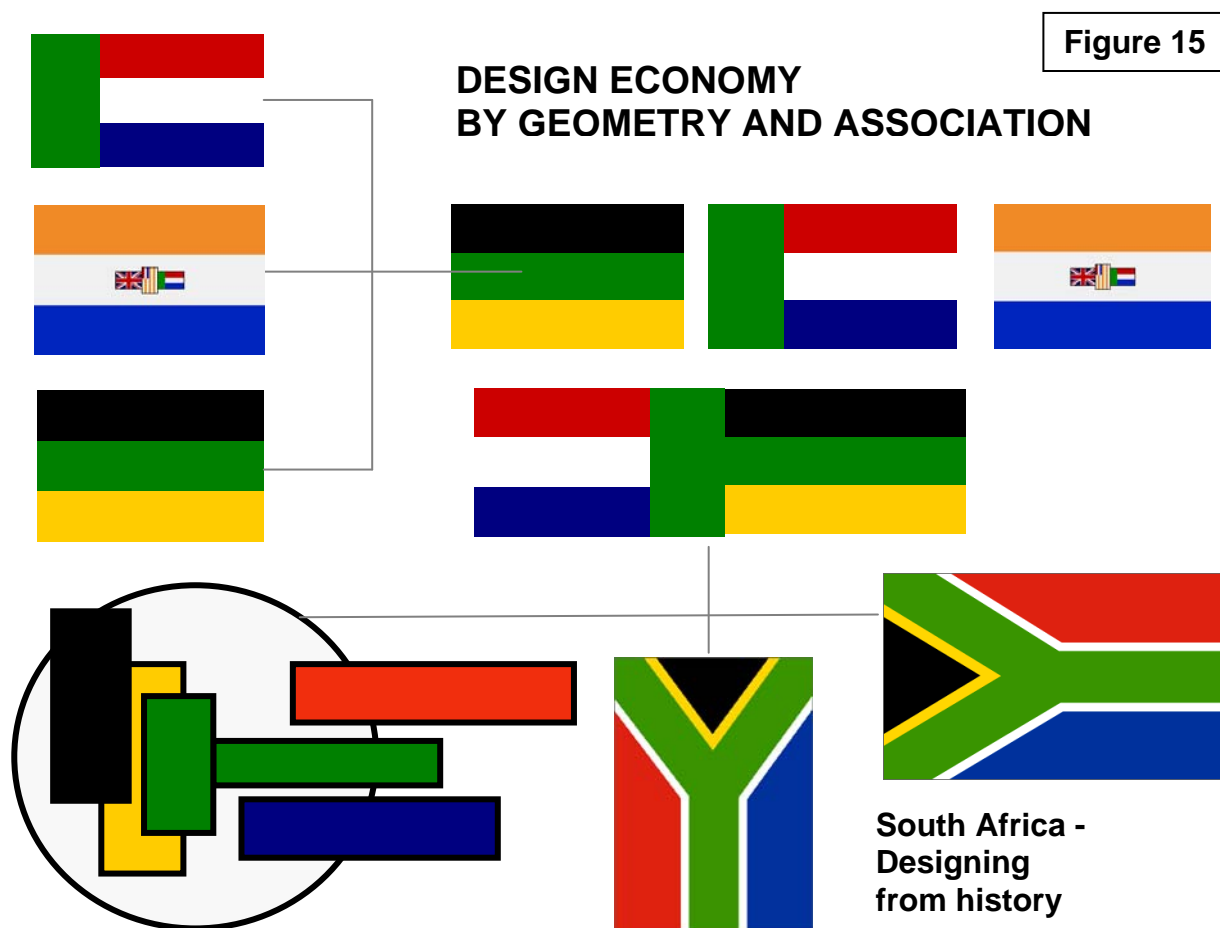
The two flags of **SURINAME** (Figure 14) illustrate clutter in the one, and in the other, the principle of avoiding it by letting one symbol stand for many.

An integral part of the Netherlands from 1954, Dutch Guiana, or Suriname, in 1966 adopted a flag remarkable for its uninspiring, unimaginative design and above all, lazy symbolism. On a white field, five stars each a different colour according to the pigmentation of the people, were lamely linked by an elliptical black line. The white star on a white field virtually disappears.

The original flag verged on insult to the people of Suriname—settled from five continents and remarkably diverse racially. The separate star-tags almost implied that they might not get on together. And why the need for the tokenism at all?

This was a flag of its time but not a convincing symbol for a cohesive nation. On independence in 1975 it was replaced by a much stronger design—visible, bold, simple. The five stars were made one, its five points conveying the multiracial background more subtly and less offensively. Despite composition from colours of a political party, the design expresses aspiration for one Surinamese nationality, not disparate immigrant groups.

A prime example of design simplicity and economy expressing multiple symbolism, the current flag of **SOUTH AFRICA** is a decided advance on the previous flag displaying three others—and none of those representative of the majority.



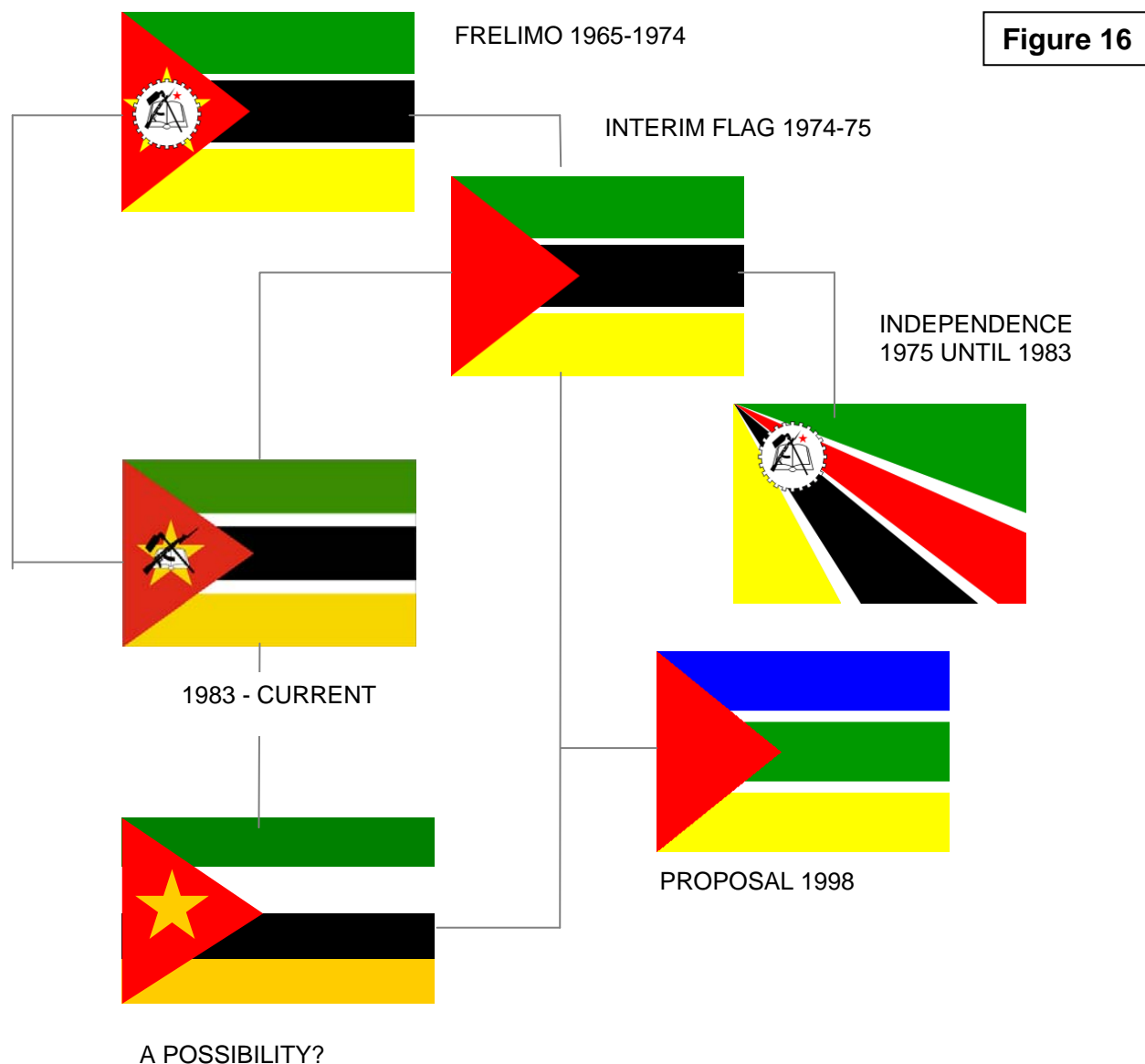
I cannot speak for Fred Brownell, designer of the flag in 1993,⁸ but a certain process of amalgamation can be discerned, illustrated in **Figure 15**.

One of the few national flags that can justify six colours, it subtly combines several historical flags, most clearly those of the 19th century Boer Republic (1858–1902) and the African National Congress. There are also allusions to the colours of the Union Jack (South Africa was one of the key dominions of the Empire) and to the flag used from 1928–1994. The segmented geometric pattern is suggestive of Ndebele house decoration. This flag even—or especially—works in vertical, suggesting a human figure allowed finally to stand and be free.

POSSIBILITIES OF DESIGN EVOLUTION

National flags with potential for simpler design include those of **Mozambique**, **Cyprus**, **Dominica**, and **St Vincent and the Grenadines**.

The current flag of **MOZAMBIQUE**, the fourth (**Figure 16**) since the independence struggle led by FRELIMO in the 1970s, is a slight design advance on the first, though devices cluttering the hoist still jostle for recognition. The arrangement of bars and stripes still flouts practical conventions of colour separation.



A history of so many similar flags suggests that in Mozambique, as elsewhere, a “core” flag design has emerged—in this case, of triangle and stripes.⁹ These elements could be retained in any further evolution of that flag. A 1998 proposal, possibly influenced by the “Rainbow” flag of neighbouring South Africa, goes only part way to a powerful simplicity. A simple, clear, and strong possible alternative balances light and dark colours.

In 1960 a white flag was devised for the **REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS** to mark a truce between the Greek and Turkish communities at loggerheads over union with Greece. Still the official flag of Cyprus, an outline map of the island in dark yellow (PMS 144) above green olive branches seeks to reinforce the hope for peace. Like the first flag of Suriname, it is a difficult design, with wide fluctuation in colour and map size. Its ineffectiveness as a unifying symbol is underlined by Turkey’s imposition of its own red on white version in the northern zone. (**Figure 17**)

In the last decade, efforts have continued to reunite the island under one flag. The map is especially odd: on the reverse it is a puzzle. Yellow, or gold, on white is visually weak and heraldically crass.

A new flag might however draw simpler yet distinctive symbolism from the old. As part of a prospective Reunification Protocol, in January 2003 the UN office in Nicosia invited design suggestions for a new flag. Guidelines included the instruction that

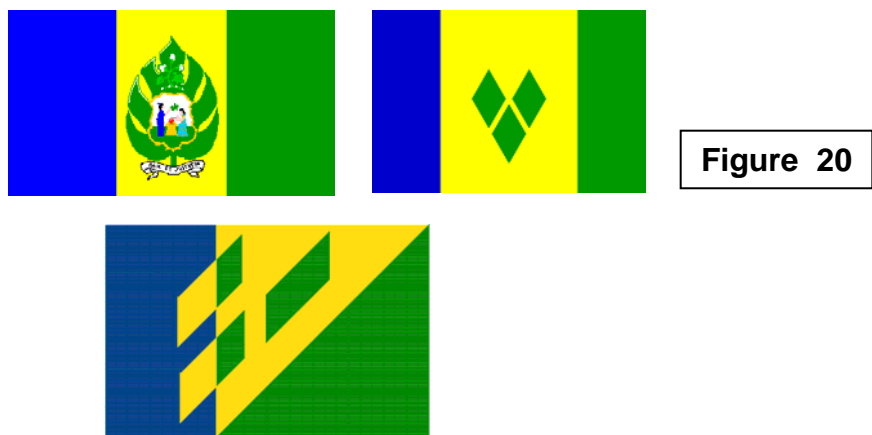
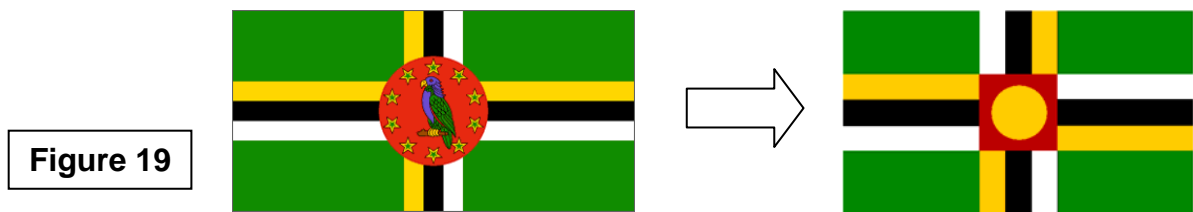
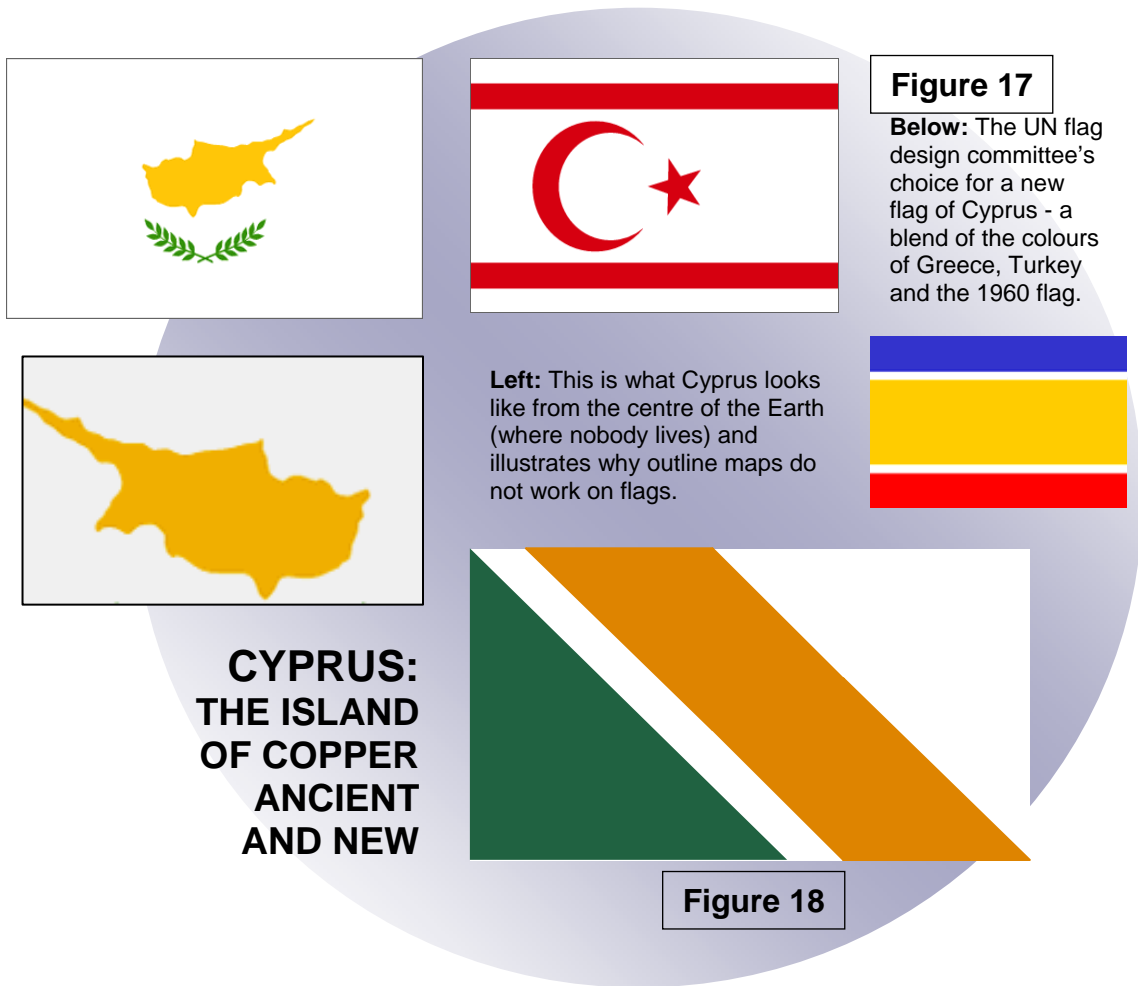
*the design should be striking, easily recognizable, pleasing to the eye and simple enough for a child to draw ... rectangular, sized 2:3 and lettering avoided.*¹⁰

A year later the UN design committee presented its choice—a compromise assembly of Greek, Turkish and federal Cypriot colours. Apart from yellow fimbriated in white, a deeper problem with this design is that it seems to perpetuate in symbol the division of the island whilst giving precedence to the Greek colours—no solution at all. This inept flag was rejected along with the other efforts to advance reunification. Only the southern part of Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004.

A suggestion submitted by this designer (**Figure 18**) retains the white field but adds two panels towards the hoist. Both colours relate to the name of the island—**Kypriaki, Kibris**—the Land of Copper, blue-green for the verdigris of ancient copper, lustrous red-gold for the new.¹¹

The flag of **DOMINICA** has been amended twice since independence in 1978 to correct heraldic errors in the detail of the parrot, the stars and the colour arrangement of the cross (initially yellow and white were contiguous). Yellow is stated to stand for the original Carib people, and thus first to face the hoist. Black refers, among other symbolism, to the Islanders’ African heritage.¹²

The 10 stars stand for the districts of the island; the rare Sisserou parrot is unique to Dominica. A badge of such detail makes a complicated flag. The flag could be simplified, (**Figure 19**) if there were the will to do so. Exactly how, without controversy is challenging: the parrot seems secure on its perch. One suggestion shown here makes a feature of the Caribbean sun against the central red field of the present design. The two parrots in the Arms might seem enough already.



Still in the Caribbean, **ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES (SVG)** has had two attempts at settling on a satisfactory flag. (Figure 20)

Whilst the 1985 flag suggested by a Swiss graphic artist is a distinct improvement on its predecessor, cluttered with a colonial badge, what appears to be a Canadian Pale squashed into 2:3 proportions seems a distortion, placing the flag of SVG among a half-dozen optically odd flags (Lesotho, Tajikistan, São Tomé e Príncipe, Belize, Marshall Islands, Seychelles).

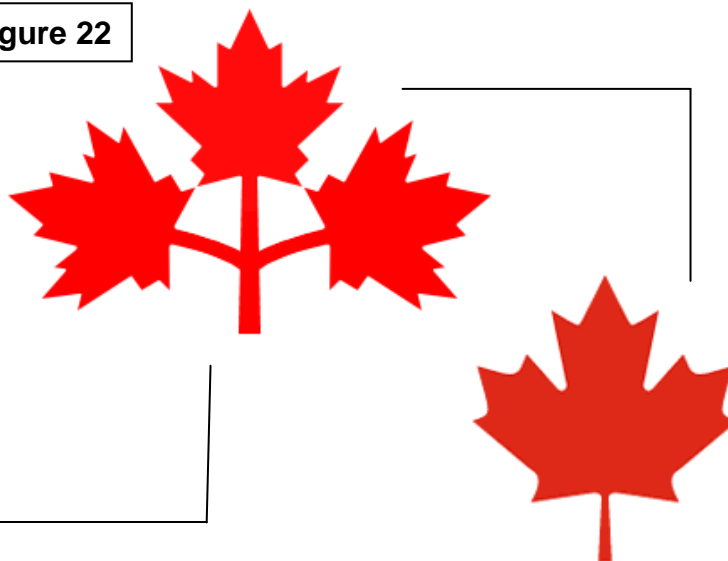
The same symbolism might be presented more powerfully. One possibility would make the central device the main feature, to convey in the colours of the Caribbean the concept of the country's popular name—The Gems of the Antilles.



Figure 21



Figure 22



Letting a part represent the whole in this way is a graphic technique suited to flags. (**Figure 21**) In the emblem of Sydney's Taronga Zoo, the submerged part of the platypus is a void relative to the tail and beak above water. Part of the design is not specifically there but the whole *is* there. Likewise, on the flag of Kazakhstan enough is present to show that what appears to be a wreath under the sun is also an eagle, as a symbol of freedom and the steppes. Princess Cruises' logo combines sun, sea and goddess—three in one.

A similar economy of symbolism may eventuate in **AUSTRALIA** where the Southern Cross has been represented on flags and ensigns since 1832.¹⁴ The constellation on the present flag takes third place, after the Union Jack in the canton and the Commonwealth star at the hoist.¹⁵ However, it appears to be the emblem on the flag that Australians most relate to and will likely want to see in any future national flag.¹⁶

The Southern Cross may be due for an upgrade to hoist and pole position, if not centre stage. A home-grown flag that does just this was raised on the gold-fields at Ballarat Victoria in 1854—albeit for less than a week. (**Figure 23**)

On a blue field, five white 8-pointed stars mark nodal points upon a literal cross. After 150 years of neglect and obscurity, the Eureka flag is now considered a national icon, and what remains of the original has been comprehensively restored in 2010–2011.

Modern versions employ some licence in fimbriating the stars from the white cross-bars.

Another approach patented in 2005,¹⁷ **Figure 24** builds on this design evolution, to blend the symbolism of Eureka with the idea of a Federation offering place to settlers from the four corners of the world. The Australian flag of 1901 was conceived as a Federal flag. The star arrangement in the centre of this design might also reflect the manner in which the national Parliament crowns the Capitol Hill in Canberra.

Apart from the dynamic of interlocking stars, the design uses overlay or palimpsest—that is to say, a background image of a circle is created by the geometry of the interlocking stars. Focus on the large star of the Federation: the circle in which it sits appears as an optical effect. Whilst the Aboriginal flag features a circular sun, the intent is to imply the *bora* ring of Aboriginal ceremonies, and today, the rituals of national and civic commitment.

The Eureka flag has a chequered history and is still claimed by some to have been an emblem of insurrection, a supposition not supported by an eyewitness account recently uncovered.¹⁸ Even so, it is unlikely that Australians, of this generation at least, will warm to a controversial flag of the mid-19th century, if for no other reason than perception of it as a period piece, with a history of hijacking to extremist causes of both left and right. (The antidote of course is for the people to reclaim the flag as their own.)

A more conservative approach (**Figure 25**) would indeed see the Southern Cross in some variation made the primary device in a flag of familiar colours, a red band evoking connection with Australia's history as a British foundation and at the same time the concept of a much older land of ochre.¹⁹

Attachment to the land is at the heart of Aboriginal culture, and the sense of home that makes us all of one blood.²⁰ This is an evolutionary approach to design that takes the known and

familiar and turns it into what may be unknown, but not alien. It is a flag that makes the most of one device, the constellation tilted to the hoist to acknowledge the land and its people “bound by the crimson thread of kinship.”²¹

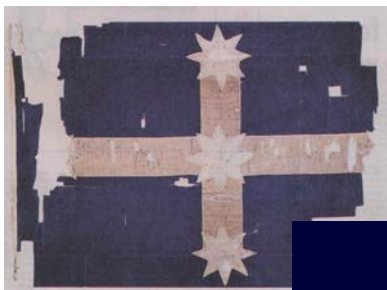


Figure 23

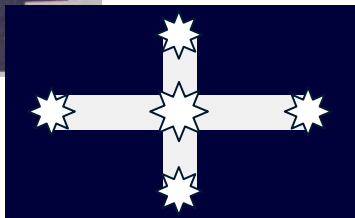


Figure 24

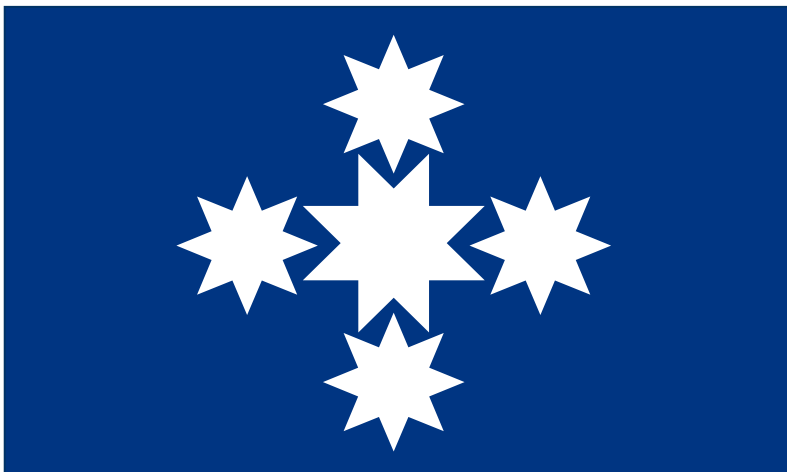
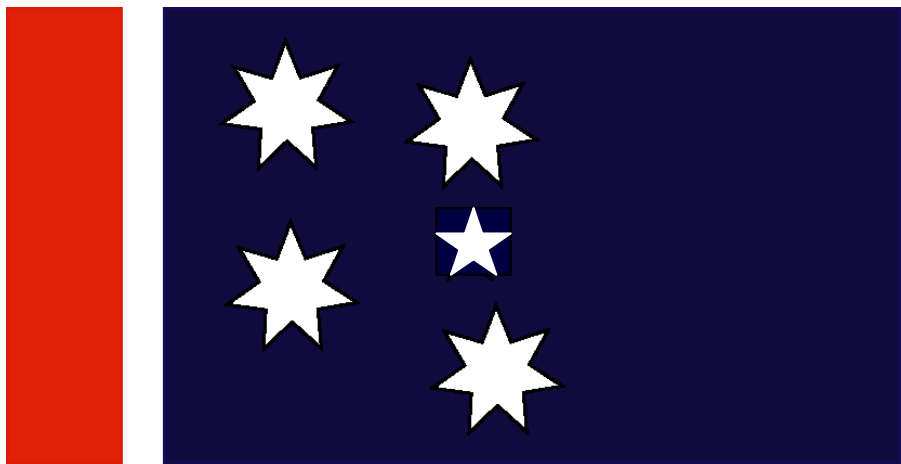


Figure 25



FINALLY, ORIGAMI

Plain geometrics make the simplest, utilitarian and in many ways, most effective flags. Though not a flag, the symbol of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Company Ltd (HSBC) **Figure 26** is a good example, among many in the corporate sector, of this genre—the origami school of vexillography. Simply, it is a red square whose diagonal quarters fold inward and outward.²²

Whilst practically any play of geometry can produce startling and remarkable flags that will be distinctive, the approach also risks idiosyncrasy. Trendy today, kitsch to come.

There are trustier tools than mannerism for its own sake. With reference to the second guideline of design consultancy, there are such aspects as precedent. What customary, existing symbols work? Among the critical criteria is “Will it play in Peoria?”²³

In this context, as mentioned above, Australians seem committed to the Southern Cross (even as its official colours of green and gold are also those of Brazil and South Africa). With these caveats, **Figure 27** shows some purely geometrical possibilities for an Australian flag—without the Southern Cross. Each of them might convey, albeit with some abstraction, community and geographical realities: a red continent set in the South Pacific, a settler society heir to millennia of indigenous cultural development, a shared homeland.

A PARAGON OF DESIGN

To return to the wider world of flags design—and leaving aside considerations of history, emotion, or familiarity—from the point of view purely of design, is there an ideal flag design?

The general provisions governing visibility—a centre or mast focus—remain, but as to detail, there is no Holy Grail of flag design. However, one, as abstract as the innovative suggestions just illustrated, stands out: the Union Jack.

This is a personal view, and not because I grew up under it. Most Australians of my generation took the British flag for granted and paid no great attention to it—or to any flag. For most Australian-born, nostalgia for British identity is not the issue. British subjects, once we were, but not British nationals, and certainly not, for more than 180 years, British colonials.²⁴ Polling responses fluctuate according to the questions asked, but the most recent in April 2010 suggests that Australians seem content to tolerate the ambiguity of an inherited flag as yet unmatched or surpassed in design.²⁵

The criterion underpinning my view is the simplicity and power of a flag with a focal point. Even a composite logo needs a focus if its disparate parts are to make whole sense. The challenge to represent three nations on one flag is met in this singular and evolved combination of layered symbols in a way not achieved, for example (and for only two countries) in the 19th century Scandinavian Union Mark. (**Figure 28**)

However, the Union Jack is a one-off. Others will have to get their own.



Figure 27

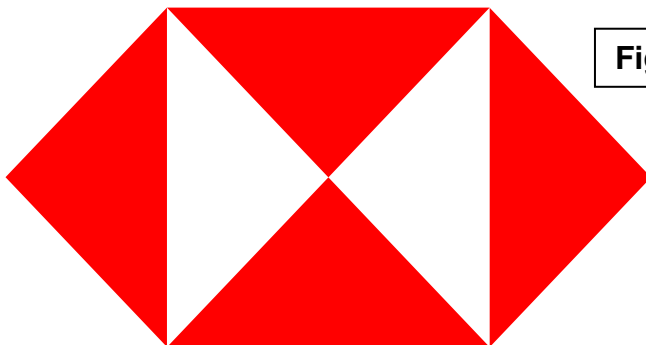


Figure 26



Below: The correct alignment of the components of the Union flag, drawings by Ralph Kelly. The arms of the red diagonal cross of St Patrick are set *gyronny*—rotating offset—to allow precedence to the white saltire of Scotland when three flags are combined.
 Ralph Kelly, *Construction of the Union Jack*
Crux Australis Volume 21/4, No.88, Oct–Dec 2008

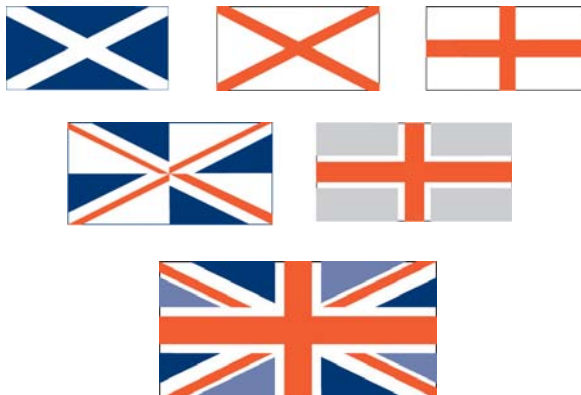


Figure 28

SUMMARY OF GUIDELINES

As to how that might be achieved, practical guidelines for the designer canvassed in this paper might be summarised in relation to:

THE BRIEF

1. Consider and listen to the client—and consult.
2. Note carefully what are considered essential emblems.

TECHNIQUE

1. Observe the practicalities of flag wear. Design accordingly.
2. Follow the tried conventions of colour separation.
3. Stylise, simplify rather than depict literally.
4. Less is more. A focal point unites. As far as possible, use one symbol to interpret many—both obvious and implicit. Let a part represent the whole. Consider layered symbols. A void is an image in flag design as space is in architecture.
5. A good flag allows some degree of the unspoken—appealing thus more widely.
6. An evolutionary approach to the familiar can express the old in a new way.
7. Think outside the frame, but beware mannerism. Fashion is fickle.

ETHICS

1. Insist on the highest standards of graphic art, not just technical expertise.
2. Apply real skill and knowledge of symbols and an eye for line.
3. Avoid imposition: explain what is not clear.
4. Justify each colour and symbol.
5. Respect what is given in the Eureka moment.

On which now some final words.

THE EUREKA MOMENT IN DESIGN— A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Examples in this paper may illustrate how to design effective flags. But what of the cognitive process that ends with the design falling into place? What is this moment of illumination that, for the designer at least, seems inspired?

The Eureka moment may be described as insight as to the fitness of a design.

There are many factors that give a flag its fitness. Long usage—tradition, familiarity—is sometimes taken as sufficient, and the place of “core” flags has been mentioned. Beyond custom, and a sense of what will play in Peoria, are more abstract qualities. When it comes to purely the aspect of design, whatever factor of “wow” has been achieved relies on two qualities especially pertinent to flags—beauty and simplicity.

Beauty is one of those imponderables that evade precision. However, as a working definition, beauty is perceived as a degree of harmony and proportion—proportionate that is, to how we recognise ourselves as human beings. Beauty may not be only a human creation but a response to it is human. As noted earlier, powerful flags seduce the mind as well as the eye. In flags, the heralds of beauty are line and colour. It is no accident that the conventions of colour and geometry in heraldry persist in flagcraft. Designers might acknowledge, celebrate and use them more consistently.

Simplicity: Complexity, both physical and metaphorical, is composed, ultimately, of the simple. Expressing that simplicity in flag design is the challenge: simplicity is seldom—indeed, cannot be—contrived.

The *dynamic* is harder to define. The Eureka insight is known for what it is, though until that point it is both known and unknown—that is, the designer knows (or hopes) that it may emerge—but has no idea of when and how or what precise form it will take. From the moment of insight, the rest is simply geometry.

Undoubtedly a process triggers the Eureka moment. At an immediate and apparently obvious level are the designer’s deliberate essays—notes, a pin-board of likely or relevant themes, diagrams, sketches. Indeed, geometry itself, playing outside the conventional rectangle, may help designer’s block. But all these at best produce approximations.

The Greeks referred to their Muse, or their *daemon*. I do not know that transcendent beings need or are needed to pull strings. However certain events and ideas do seem to transcend the individual ego. As our own technology confirms, messengers or voices in the air are not alien to our nature or ingenuity. Ockham’s Razor still applies, however. The insight of the Eureka moment, its perception, and its recognition, is well within the synaptic competence of our brains, inherited and evolving through the hundred thousand generations of our forebears.

And so, with due respect for the experience and skill of individual designers, contact with others, directly or in what they have written, of ideas bounced among peers is suggestive. The social milieu of a Congress, with its heightened focus on flags and shared information,

played some part in devising the South African flag.²⁶ And, in the case of Canada, a chance remark proved provocative and productive.

Here I think is a clue to where insight comes from. Raising the standards of design may be as much a collective effort as it is the exclusive achievement of gifted loners. The Eureka insight is a gift—or is it a loan?—to the designer from the symbols archived over the eons in the collective unconscious.²⁷

Breakthroughs in design as in other things often come from places overlooked. While an individual can see what others do not see, others may see what an individual doesn't. So the third guideline of flag design remains: is there anything else? What is the substance in the void? Things are not always what they seem, and in fact may not be meant to be what they seem.

Creativity is within us all in varying ways. When ideas and insight arrive unbidden, as is their habit, they are indeed a gift. They are a reflection, I do suggest, not of who but of what we are. The constant but unconscious electric activity of our brains are part of the cosmic dance, as are the cultural influences that flood our lives as circumstances or innate curiosity allow.

In this paper I have referred to various stages and types of knowing. I also referred to the style of flags in the future. Unless designers are curious, the unknown, the untried, in flag design will remain that—unknown. Flags will be seen just as curiosities. In this field at least, that would be a failure of imagination.

As much as in any realm of knowledge, for the vexillologist and serious designer, active curiosity is essential. Its twin is alertness, creativity their synthesis. In the world of flags, as in the world itself, there are many wonders. In a way, that is why we are here today.

NOTES

- 1 Ted Kaye, **Good Flag, Bad Flag**, North American Vexillological Association, 2001
- 2 English medieval scholar William of Ockham (1285–1349) known for his aphorism (Ockham's Razor) *entia non multiplicanda sunt*. It may be paraphrased to state that there is no need to seek extraordinary causes when an obvious or sufficient one exists—and applied to design, that there is no need for clutter.
- 3 The warrior pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel but constantly had his minions interfere to demand a completion date. Visitors might note the caricature in the bottom right corner of the *Last Judgment*.
- 4 Counterpoint is used here in its secondary meaning—a contrasting but parallel element, item, or theme; the use of contrasting elements in a work of art. Counterpoint can be enhanced by the heraldic device of technique of counterchange—in opposing field and charges, the one reversing colours of the other.
- 5 Ralph GC Bartlett, in *Flags of Australian Celebration*, **Crux Australis**, Volume 23/2 ,No 94, April–June 2010 observes, pp53 and 62, that if logo flags are going to be effective, the design has to be bold and clear. Many of those sanctioned for celebrations appear to give little consideration as to what the emblem would look like on a moving flag.
- 6 This is a very condensed. John Matheson, **Canada's Flag: A Search for a Country**, Boston 1980 goes into more detail, pp25, 82, 84, and p40 where he refers to the provisions of Order-in-Council *PC 5888*, 5 September 1945, making it clear that the red ensign was an interim flag until formal adoption by Parliament of a national flag.

On British imperial ensign usage, see Ralph D Kelly, *Australian State Flags 1867–1904: A British Admiralty Legacy* in **Proceedings of the 13th International Congress of Vexillology 1989**, and **Crux Australis** Volume 8/4, No.36, October–December 1992, updated in *State Badges and Flags Revisited* **Crux Australis** Volume 20/1, No 81, January–March 2007.
- 7 The story of Indira Gandhi's intervention appears to come from a Bengali reporter, and is related on the FOTW Bangladesh page.
- 8 Fred Brownell, then Director Bureau of Heraldry Pretoria South Africa, recounted to Ralph Bartlett in Pretoria in 1997 (and he to me) how in Zurich he had toyed with a design in the ICV breaks that was evidently the prototype of the flag he was asked to produce at short notice 8 months later.
- 9 For elucidation of the concept of core flags, after Whitney Smith, see Ralph Kelly, *Caudillos, Coups, Constitutions and Changes: An Analysis of Flag Changes in Latin America*, **Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Vexillology, Buenos Aires 2005 (CD)** reprinted in **Crux Australis** Volume 20/4, No. 84, October–December 2007.
- 10 Conditions of submission to Cyprus Flag Design Competition, 27 January 2003.
- 11 Submission by A Burton to UN Office, Nicosia.
- 12 The Flag of Dominica is detailed under Act No. 18 of 1978, **The National Emblems of Dominica Act**, Gazette 1 November 1978, effective 3 November 1978. The flag was amended in 1981 and 1990 to correct heraldic errors and to adjust the colouring of the parrot and the stars.
- 13 A Maple leaf, popular among French settlers in Canada, was used as the emblem of the francophone Saint Jean Baptiste Society established in Quebec in 1834, and in 1860 again as an emblem by Canadian-born on the visit of the Prince of Wales.

- 14 Australia's earliest mercantile flag, albeit unofficial, was the NSW Ensign, featuring four, and later, five stars on a blue cross, the latter documented on the flag chart in the 1832 NSW Post Office Calendar. See Tony Burton, *John Bingle's Notebooks*, **Crux Australis** Vol.21/2 No.86, April–June and 21/3, No.87, July–September 2008.
- 15 On the current flag the Southern Cross takes third place, in the fly, after the Union Jack in the canton and the Commonwealth Star at the hoist. This last was instituted in 1901 to differentiate the new federal flag from the otherwise virtually identical flag of Victoria. The amendment created a flag precedent over all the Australian flags, but as a flag of nationality, co-equal with the Union Jack until 1953.
- 16 See *Southern Cross Suite* of four articles in **Crux Australis** Vol. 23/1, No 93, Jan–March 2010, pp20–28.
- 17 This flag is detailed in A Burton, *Behold, a Quincunx: Eureka Moments in Design*, **Crux Australis** Volume 17/2, No 74, 2005.
- 18 *The Other Flag at Eureka*, **Crux Australis** Volume 24/3, No 99, July–September 2011.
- 19 This concept of the author's has been suggested in **Crux Australis** on several occasions, (Nos 33, 38, 78, 85, 88) albeit with stylistic variations in portraying the Southern Cross. Australians have become used to the graphically awkward 7-pointed stars and have forgotten earlier usage of the simpler and an easier 8-pointed style.
- 20 CG Jung, **The Collected Works: Volume 5, Symbols of Transformation**, Tr. RFC Hull from German, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1956. Para 75, p49: *the unconscious is infinitely more common to all men than are the contents of their consciousness....*and para 258, p177: *The unconscious ... is universal: it not only binds individuals together into a nation or race, but unites them with the men of the past and with their psychology ...*
- 21 The “crimson thread of kinship” was used by Sir Henry Parkes, one of the Founding Fathers of (Australian) Federation—an expression ambiguous enough to remind all Australians that irrespective of where they were born, they are one nation and one people.
- 22 The emblem was designed by Norman Foster, British architect of HSBC headquarters in Hong Kong.
- 23 Originally associated with theatre, the expression, “Will it play in Peoria?” (Illinois) has acquired common reference in the US to test whether a product, person, promotional theme, or event will appeal to mainstream America, or across a broad range of demographic and sociographic groups. The phrase has been adopted by politicians, pollsters, and promoters to question potential mainstream acceptance of anything new.
- 24 A distinctly Australian identity was discernible by the 1820s as the locally-born children of free settlers came of age. The original reference is Peter Cunningham, **Two Years in New South Wales**, Letter XX1 1826, pp54–56.
- 25 Roy Morgan Research 2010 *Clear Majority Want to Keep the Australian Flag*. In response to the question: “Do you think Australia should have a new design for our National Flag?” 27% were in favour, and 67% against (6% uncommitted). A similar result obtained when to the question whether the Union Jack should be retained, 71% were in favour, 24% were against (5% uncommitted). See www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4495. It should be noted that the survey was conducted over two nights in “late April” coinciding with the national (and (and patriotic) Anzac Day and followed aggravated publicity over TV personality Ray Martin's call for a new flag leading up to Australia Day three months before. These facts alone may have skewed the responses.
- 26 Footnote 8 above about Fred Brownell and the 15th ICV in Zurich.
- 27 CG Jung, **Collected Works**, loc.cit.

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Southern Cross Suite four articles **Crux Australis** 23/1, No. 93, Jan–March 2010, pp20–28.
The Other Flag at Eureka, **Crux Australis** 24/3, No 99 July–September 2011.
- FOTW Bangladesh, Canada, Cyprus, Dominica, Mozambique, St Vincent and the Grenadines,
South Africa, Suriname.
- Statistics **Roy Morgan Poll**—www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2010/4495.

APPENDIX A

THE BANNER OF THE 26TH ICV SYDNEY AUSTRALIA 2015

Several suggestions referred, stylised or literally, to the Opera House as emblematic of Sydney. However Australia is more than Sydney. In the end it was felt that the landmark Bridge spanning its equally iconic harbour was a stronger symbol than a tourist attraction. Metaphorically, it links Congress delegates from many shores.

Intricate and ceremonial rather than stark and spare, as most flags need to be, this is a banner, a poster even. Various symbols contribute to its tapestry, to convey and underscore the pageantry of flags and the occasion.

The design is tightly integrated, its devices represented in various explicit and implicit ways. Roman numerals proclaim the 26th Congress. There are references to the host Society's flag and emblem, the Southern Cross and kangaroo vexomorph adopted at the Melbourne Congress 26 years before. Counter-changing binds a design of shifting shapes. Blue and gold evoke the livery of FIAV and the City of Sydney; red and gold the ochres of Australia; blue, white, and red the national flag.

The metamorphoses in the ICV26 design underline that things need not always be what they appear to be. Uncomfortable though the concept may seem when flags—military flags at least—are supposed to be unequivocal, this is not obfuscation. Haldane's aphorism about the cosmos applies—and applies consistently.¹ Some degree of ambiguity allows a flag to mean different things to different people, enhancing its acceptance—and may explain why still a majority of Australians are not deeply concerned that there is a foreign flag on theirs.

Some of the more esoteric symbolism is deliberately ironic. The hosts juggle with organising the Congress; the golden arch of the Harbour Bridge might also be the Yellow Brick Road that leads delegates to meet the flag wizards of Oz and hopefully to where they want to be. Dots redolent of Aboriginal Desert Painting, here forming the Southern Cross, might also be thought bubbles (which is in fact what the Desert Dots are in their execution), as delegates reflect on the flags at Congress and on its other realities.

1 JBS Haldane: **Possible worlds and other essays**, Chatto & Windus, London, 1927.

"Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose. I suspect that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, or can be dreamed of, in any philosophy."

APPENDIX B

CANADA'S FLAG DESIGN QUEST

The official national flag of Canada, from British conquest in 1763, and then from Confederation in 1867 until 1965 was the Union Jack. In line with imperial flag usage ordained in 1865, blue and red ensigns with a badge in the fly, representing the four original members of the Confederation, were authorised for restricted use, the red specifically from 1892. The badge was amended in 1922 to match the shield in the Coat of Arms granted in 1921. From 1924, the red ensign was used informally on government buildings and Canadian legations abroad and in 1945 declared a “temporary” national flag, pending the design and formal adoption of a national flag.¹ The red ensign is reported from Canadian Forces HQ at Normandy and in the Korean War.²

Prime Minister Mackenzie King had in fact sought to settle the issue of a Canadian national flag in 1925 and again in 1945. He rejected the Parliamentary Committee’s proposal for a red ensign bearing a yellow Maple leaf outlined in white, and dropped the issue as too divisive after opposition from Empire loyalists and criticism of them from the Premier of Quebec (the two silhouettes arguing).³ (Figure 11)

The ambiguity of the Canadian ensign was driven home after the Suez crisis when Nasser was reported to have bluntly told UN Peace-keeping organizer Lester Pearson in 1957 that Egyptians would not accept a Canadian contingent as “your flag carries the British flag”.⁴

Also in 1957, the green Maple Leaves in the Arms and the ensign’s badge turned red. The gesture was too late. It was the autumn of the Empire, the red on the map was fading.

Tinkering around the edges was not enough. Symbols matter. The *right* symbols matter.

In 1963, and now Prime Minister, Pearson staked his government on establishing a Canadian national flag. Crucial to the process was not only Pearson’s leadership. A different alternative to the blue, white, and red suggestion derided by the conservative opposition as “Pearson’s pennant” emerged as the compromise design from suggestions submitted by the public. Matheson, a member of the Parliamentary Committee (and arguably the architect of the final result) relates how the Eureka moment seemed to come when Lt. Col George Stanley of the Canadian Royal Military College suggested the College flag as a viable model.⁵ The dénouement came when opposition on the Flag Committee wrongly presumed that the government would insist on voting for Pearson’s proposal, and voted for a design based on the College flag. But so did the supporters of change, to deliver a unanimous decision of the 14-member Committee. The opposition was snookered by a revolutionary design that managed to be seen as evolutionary.⁶

The flag changed. Canada still stretches “from sea to sea”, from the red dawn over one coast, to the red dusk on the other.

APPENDIX B—CANADA NOTES

- 1 This is a very condensed summary. John Matheson, **Canada's Flag: A Search for a Country**, Boston 1980 goes into more detail, pp25, 82, 84, and p40 where he refers to the provisions of Order-in-Council *PC 5888*, 5 September 1945 making it clear that the red ensign was an interim flag until formal adoption by Parliament of a national flag.

On imperial ensign usage see Ralph D Kelly *Australian State Flags 1867–1904: A British Admiralty Legacy Proceedings ICV 13*, Flag Society of Australia Melbourne 1994, and **Crux Australis** Volume 8/4, No.36, October–December 1992, updated in *State Badges and Flags Revisited Crux Australis* Volume 20/1 no 81 Jan–March 2007
- 2 Matheson p38—“a Canadian Army routine order of 22 January 1944 announced that ‘The Canadian Red Ensign with the shield of the Coat of Arms of Canada in the fly is to be flown at all units of the Canadian Army serving with the forces of other nations’.”
Specific to D-Day cfr <http://www.junobeach.org/e/2/can-eve-rod-nor-fla-e.htm>
- 3 Matheson pp41–64 describes the 1945 Parliamentary Committee established to “consider and report upon a suitable design for a distinctive national flag”. The Committee became mired in acrimonious debate on the extent to which such a flag should include British and French elements. Of 42,168 written submissions and 2,695 designs submitted by the public, 1,611 included the maple leaf, 383 the Union Jack, and 184 the fleur-de-lis.

On 12 July 1946 the Committee recommended “that the national flag in Canada should be the Canadian Red Ensign with a maple leaf in autumn golden colours bordered white replacing the Coat of Arms in the fly”. Mackenzie King refused to accept the committee’s recommendation and dropped the whole issue as too divisive, due to widespread political and public criticism, and especially opposition from the Premier of Quebec.
- 4 For the reference to Nasser, see Alistair B Fraser, **The Flags of Canada** (Chapter V) which gives his source as Chicago Tribune Press Service, January 5, 1957.
- 5 Matheson p122 acknowledges Lt. Col. George FG Stanley, Dean of Arts at the Royal Military College as essentially the designer of the Canadian flag:
We had just emerged from the college mess and Dr Stanley remarked “There, John, is your flag.” Interpreting him literally I remarked that Canadians would not accept a mailed fist symbol. He said, “No, I mean with a red maple leaf in place of the College Crest.”
- 6 Matheson pp126–128, 132–133, describes the delicate strategy followed to ensure the election of a flag, as distinct from yet another ensign of the kind sought by the conservative opposition.

About the Author

Tony Burton is a long-standing member of **Flags Australia** and its executive. He is also the editor of its journal ***Crux Australis*** and a member of the **Heraldry Society of Australia**.

He has a keen interest in the principles and practice of flag design. He is the author of many cross-cultural articles on flags and aspects of Australian flag history. Some of his work is reflected in the emblems of Aboriginal Councils, and he is the designer of the Australian South Sea Islanders flag.

Other designs of his have won award in several competitions conducted as part of the debate over the Australian flag.

In 2010 his essay *A Clash of Symbols: Does the Flag Matter?* was published in **Caught in the Breeze**, a collection of cross-generational Australian opinion on flags.



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