

Modern Flag Design

An expansion of
Good Flag, Bad Flag:
How to Design a Great Flag

Martin Joubert
with the advice of Ted Kaye

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Introduction

This book lays out five basic principles for good flag design, and then shows examples of flags that follow them and flags that disregard them. Whatever the challenge that awaits you, You can use these five basic principles to create an outstanding flag for your organization, school, city, tribe, company, family, neighborhood, or even your country!

The creation of a flag must be democratic. Exchange your ideas, share your creations, assure that your design suits what it represents in the long term. It is also a very interesting exercise to explore designs with those who will be united under a new banner.

Good luck in your adventure!



What is a flag?



A flag should be simple, readily made, and capable of being made up in bunting; it should be different from the flag of any other country, place or people; it should be significant; it should be readily distinguishable at a distance; the colors should be well contrasted and durable; and lastly, and not the least important point, it should be effective and handsome.

— National Flag Committee of the Confederate States of America, 1861



What is a flag?

A flag is a piece of fabric (most often rectangular) with a distinctive design and colours. It is used as a symbol, a signalling device, or for decoration. The term flag is also used to refer to the graphic design employed, and flags have evolved into a general tool for rudimentary signalling and identification, especially in environments where communication is challenging (such as the maritime environment, where semaphore or signal flags are used). The study of flags is known as «vexillology» from the Latin vexillum, meaning «flag» or «banner».

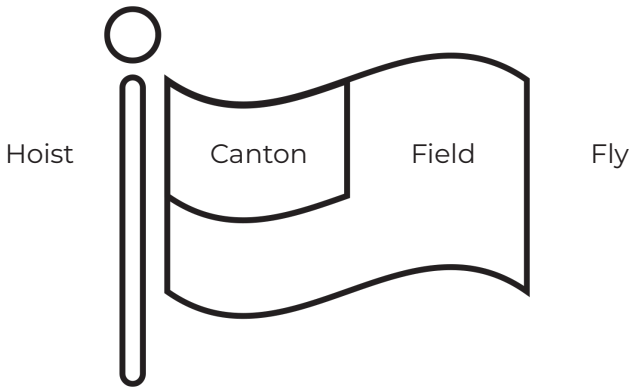
A national flag represents and symbolizes a country. The national flag is flown by the government of a country, but can usually also be flown by citizens of the country. A national flag is designed with specific meanings for its colours and symbols. The colours of the national flag may be worn by the people of a nation to show their patriotism, or related paraphernalia that show the symbols or colours of the flag may be used for those purposes.

The design of a national flag may be altered after important historical events. The burning or destruction of a national flag is a greatly symbolic act.

Flags are patriotic symbols with widely varied interpretations that often include strong military associations because of their original and ongoing use for that purpose. Flags are

also used in messaging, advertising, or for decorative purposes.

Use of flags beyond the military or maritime context began with the rise of nationalist sentiment at the end of the 18th century; the earliest national flags date to that period, and during the 19th century it became common for every sovereign state to adopt a national flag.



Anatomy of a flag

Modern Flag Design

An expansion of “Good Flag, Bad Flag: How to Design a Great Flag”

Good Flag, Bad Flag: How to Design a Great Flag, first published in 2001, articulated the five principles of good flag design synthesized by Ted Kaye and the North American Vexillological Association – The Flag Experts of the United States and Canada. The distillation of the expertise of over 20 vexillologists/vexillographers, it has become a classic resource for those wishing to design or re-design a flag.

Many flags have changed since the publication of that book, and its overall design deserved refreshing. This expansion, created with the advice and support of Ted Kaye, aims to bring more details to the five basic principles for good flag design. For each rule, we have added examples of good and bad designs, and a more in-depth analysis for each chapter.

The five principles of good flag design that form the structure of this book are: *Keep it simple, Use meaningful symbolism, Use few basic colors, No lettering or seals, Be distinctive or be related*. For each principle you will find four examples of good design – always on the left page, and four examples of bad design – always on the right page – followed by a deeper

analysis of one (or more flags) to sum up the chapter. Finally, you will find two detailed analysis of two flags (a good one and a bad one) to review all the rules around a practical case.

This book is open-source and you can find all the files used in its realization via this link: <https://flagdesignbook.com>. It is therefore up to you to enrich it or to translate it as you wish.



1

Keep it simple

*The flag should be so simple that a child
can draw it from memory*

Flags flap. Flags drape. Flags must be seen from a distance and from their opposite side. Under these circumstances, only simple designs make effective flags.

Furthermore, complicated flags cost more to make, which often can limit how widely they are used. Most poor designs have the elements of a great flag in them. Simplify them by focusing on a single symbol, a few colors, large shapes, and no lettering.

Avoid the temptation to include a symbol for everybody. Ideally, the design will be reversible or at least recognizable from either side. Don't put a different design on the back.

KEEP IT SIMPLE! - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Alaska, U.S.A.

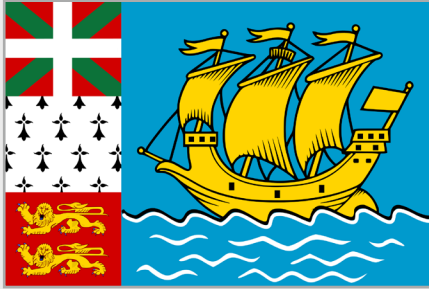
The stars, a standard U.S. symbol, form the “Big Dipper” constellation. The North Star represents the northernmost U.S. state. These minimalist elements perfectly describe the state.



Mali

The flag of Mali is tricolor with three equal vertical stripes. It displays the three pan-African colors: green, gold, and red, thus creating a link with neighboring countries.

KEEP IT SIMPLE! - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Saint-Pierre-and-Miquelon

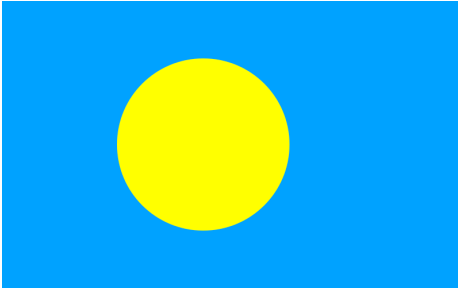
Attempting to recall the origin of most inhabitants of the islands, the flag of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, already very full, becomes unreadable - don't try to put flags within a flag.



Nyandarua County, Kenya

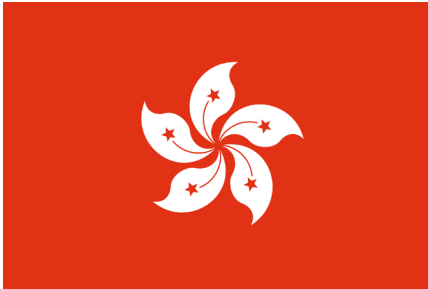
The flag centers the county emblem on a green background. The corners have curved stripes of white, blue, and black which complicates the already overloaded design.

KEEP IT SIMPLE! - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Palau

Like other flags of several other Pacific island nations, blue represents the ocean and the nation's place within it. You don't need much to create a unique flag!



Hong Kong

The design of the flag comes with cultural, political, and regional meanings. The color itself is significant; red is a festive colour for the Chinese people.

KEEP IT SIMPLE! - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Turkmenistan

This very complicated rug contains five traditional patterns! Better to leave it off and keep the moon and stars rearranged in the center of the flag for more readability.



Liège Province, Belgium

The Liège province is a great example of why you should not use a resized banner of arms as your flag. So many things are going on here, you can't understand a single one.

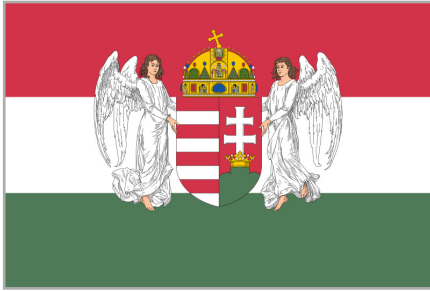
The quest for simplicity

The modern flag of Hungary originated in the national freedom movement which culminated in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. Accordingly, the Hungarian flag is based upon the tricolor French flag, as a reflection of the ideas of the French revolution. The red, white, and green colors are derived from the historical Hungarian coat of arms, which has remained the same since the mid-15th century.

Over the centuries, the flag has often changed. 12 times in the course of the 20th century! On May 23, 1957, Hungary settled on its current, tricolor flag design.

The archangels design was used until the fall of the Habsburg Empire in 1918. During the following, highly turbulent years, several hard-to-trace minor changes took place. During the anti-Soviet uprising in 1956, revolutionaries cut out the hammer and sickle emblem, resulting in a tricolor flag with a hole in the middle as a symbol of the revolution. Afterward, for some months, the new government created a «new» coat of arms, which however was never officially put onto the flag. Since then it's a pure red-white-green tricolour flag.

As you can see, flags reflect the stability or instability of a country. It is often during a long period of peace that flags find their final form, each political regime upsetting the preceding flag design.



1896 - 1915



Symbol of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956



Hungary's current flag



2

Use meaningful symbolism

*The flag's images, colors, or patterns
should relate to what it symbolizes*

Symbolism can be in the form of the “charge” or main graphic element, in the colors used, or sometimes even in the shapes or layout of the parts of the flag.

Usually, a single primary symbol is best. Avoid those that are less likely to be representative or unique. Colors often carry meanings: red for blood or sacrifice, white for purity, blue for water or sky.

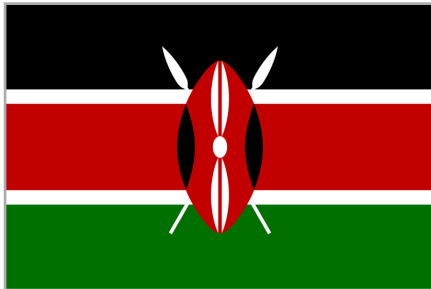
Diagonal stripes are often used by former colonies as an alternative to the generally horizontal and vertical stripes of European countries.

USE MEANINGFUL SYMBOLISM - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Greenland

The white stripe represents the glaciers and ice cap; the red stripe, the ocean; the red semicircle, the fjords; and the white semicircle, the icebergs. Greenland in a nutshell!



Kenya

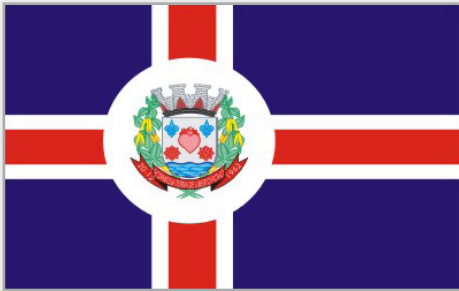
The black, red, and green stripes, separated by white, bearing a red, white and black Maasai shield and two crossed spears - all recall the Kenyan people.

USE MEANINGFUL SYMBOLISM - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Cochabamba, Bolivia

The flag of the department of Cochabamba is light blue. A solid-color flag is too simple and is meaningless when depicted in grayscale.



Lagoa Formosa, Brazil

Did you instantly think about Iceland or any Scandanavian country at the sight of this flag and its Nordic cross? Nice try, but Lagoa Formosa is a Brazilian municipality.

USE MEANINGFUL SYMBOLISM - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Uruguay

The horizontal stripes represent the nine original departments of Uruguay, based on the U.S. flag. The Sun of May represents the May Revolution of 1810.



Nunavut, Canada

The colors blue and gold represent the "riches of land, sea, and sky", while red represents Canada. The *inuksuk*, which divides the flag, is a traditional stone monument.

USE MEANINGFUL SYMBOLISM - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Tenerife, Spain

No one really knows why the Tenerife flag is the same as Scotland's. According to some, it's because several wealthy Scottish merchants settled there.



Navajo Nation, U.S.A.

Over 20 graphic elements overwhelm the viewer and none are large enough to be seen easily. Did you notice the four sacred mountains of four different colors? We thought not.



European Union



Against the blue sky of the Western world, the stars represent the peoples of Europe in a circle, a symbol of unity. Their number shall be invariably set at twelve, the symbol of completeness and perfection.

— Council of Europe
Paris, 7–9 December 1955



The power of symbols

The European flag satisfies all the requirements of an ideal emblem: its good symbolism is simple and easy to interpret and is easily recognizable; it is harmonious, original, and also simple to produce. It is therefore a perfect flag from a geometric, symbolic, and political point of view. It's a very strong symbol to which Europeans are very attached, it often flies alongside the flag of the member countries on town halls or schools.

The number of stars on the flag is fixed at twelve, representing «perfection and completeness» (in the original French: *symbole de la perfection et de la plénitude*). It is not related to the number of member states of the EU (although the EU happened to have 12 member states at the time of Maastricht Treaty).

Other symbolic interpretations have been offered based on the account of its design by Paul M. Levy. The five-pointed star is used on many national flags and represents aspiration and education. The golden color is that of the sun, which is said to symbolize glory and enlightenment.

Their arrangement in a circle represents the constellation of Corona Borealis and can be seen as a crown and a symbol of stability. The blue background resembles the sky and symbolizes truth and intellect.



3

Use few basic colors

Limit the number of colors on the flag to three, which contrast well and come from the standard color set.

The basic flag colors are red, blue, green, black, yellow, and white. They can range from dark to light. Occasionally other colors are also used, such as purple, gray, and orange, but they are seldom needed in a good design.

Separate dark colors with a light color, and light colors with a dark color, to help them create effective contrast. A good flag should also reproduce well in “grayscale”, that is, in black and white shades.

More than four colors are hard to distinguish and make the flag unnecessarily complicated and expensive. Flag fabric comes in a relatively limited number of colors. Another reason to stick to the basics.

USE FEW BASIC COLORS - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Estonia

In Martin Lipp's poem "The Estonian Flag", blue is for the vaulted blue sky above the native land, black for attachment to the soil, and white for purity and hard work.



Tokyo, Japan

Adopted on November 2, 1943, Tokyo's flag is one of the rare purple flags. Dark purple is an ancient and traditional color in Japan. However, this flag feels very modern!

USE FEW BASIC COLORS - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Coquimbo, Chile

This flag adopted quite recently has a rather rare feature: gradient color, which is impossible to sew, limiting production to printed flags only.



Hela Province, Papua New Guinea

With a total of 10 colors, the flag of the Hela Province in Papua New Guinea is one of the most colorful flag in the world. Maybe a bit too much, don't you think?

USE FEW BASIC COLORS - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Corsica, France

The flag of Corsica was adopted by General of the Nation Pasquale Paoli in 1755 and was based on a traditional flag used previously. The absence of colors make it stand out!



Naval Ensign of Japan

The Rising Sun Flag was used by feudal warlords in Japan and was adopted as the naval ensign of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Thanks to these colors you instantly think of Japan.

USE FEW BASIC COLORS - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Tibet

Also known as the "snow lion flag". The raised jewel symbolizes Tibet's reverence for the three Precious Gems: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. A beautiful flag, but too confusing.



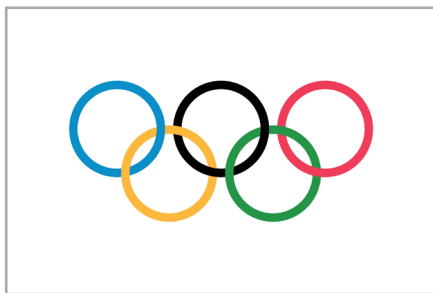
British Indian Ocean Territory

The palm tree and crown are symbols of the Indian Ocean Territory. But due to poor contrast and to the format of other British dependencies, this flag is hard to apprehend.

Some rules are made to be broken

Although 2 to 3 colors usually suffice, there can be exceptions. Indeed, the three flags below are some of the most beautiful flags in the world.

However, don't overdo it. A profusion of colors makes the flag more difficult to make. Remember to always separate dark colors with a light color and vice versa, to create contrast.



Olympic Games

This design is symbolic; it represents the five continents of the world, united by Olympism, while the six colours are those that appear on all the national flags of the world at the present time.

—Pierre de Coubertin, 1931

USE FEW BASIC COLORS - **COUNTER-EXAMPLE**



Seychelles

The diagonal rays symbolize a dynamic new country moving into the future. Each color has a distinct meaning: sky, sun, determination, justice, and nature.



South Africa

When adopted, the South African flag was the only national flag in the world to use all six basic flag colors in its primary design elements--for important symbolic reasons.

**A
B
C**

4

No Lettering or seals

*Never use writing of any kind or an
organization's seal*

Words defeat the purpose: why not just write “Japan” on a flag? A flag is a graphic symbol. Lettering is nearly impossible to read from a distance, hard to sew, and difficult to reduce to lapel-pin size. Words are not reversible—this forces double or triple-thickness fabric.

Don’t confuse a flag with a banner, such as what is carried in front of a marching band in a parade, or draped behind a speaker’s platform—such banners don’t flap, they are seen from only one side, and they’re usually seen closer-up. Seals were designed for placement on paper to be read at close range. Very few are effective on flags—too detailed. Better to use some element from the seal as a symbol. Some logos work; most don’t.

NO LETTERING OR SEALS - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Saint Lucia

The triangles represent the Pitons, twin volcanic cones located in the southwest part of the island, a national symbol of Saint Lucia.



Amazigh flag

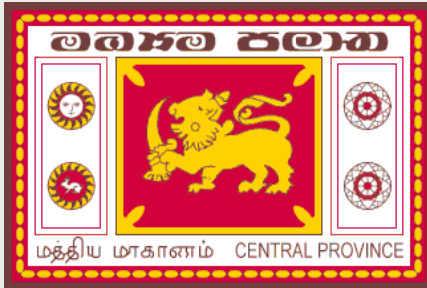
Each color corresponds to an aspect of the territory inhabited by the Amazigh in North Africa, also known as Berbers. The symbol is called “yaz” and symbolizes the “free man”.

NO LETTERING OR SEALS - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Wisconsin, U.S.A.

Wisconsin added lettering to its flag in 1979 to distinguish it from the many other blue U.S. state flags. Rather than improve its symbolism, Wisconsin chose to explain it! Rookie mistake.



Central Province, Sri Lanka

The flag has "Central Province" written on it three times: in Sinhala at the top and in Tamil and English at the bottom. Just to make sure that you know where you are!

NO LETTERING OR SEALS - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



The Vegan Movement

A letter can be simply suggested, like in the Vegan Movement flag. It consists of three blue and green triangles forming the letter V, the first letter in the word “vegan”.



Colorado, U.S.A.

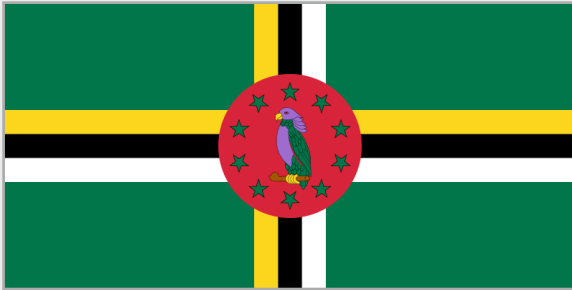
Another example of an implied letter is the flag of Colorado. It consists of bicolor horizontal triband of blue and white charged with a circular letter “C” surrounding a golden disk.

NO LETTERING OR SEALS - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



ReNaMo, Mozambique

The Nationalism and Liberalist political movement ReNaMo in Mozambique used to have a simple flag, but decided to change it to this very complex design.



Dominica

The flag, adopted in 1978, features the sisserou parrot, a bird endemic to Dominica which also appears on the coat of arms. As beautiful as it may be, it should have stayed in the rainforest!

Mistakes can be fixed!

Milwaukee is known for its complicated flag history. His current flag is one of the most complex flags in the U.S.A. In 2015, in response to negative media coverage spurred by a 99% *Invisible* episode, Steve Kodis, a local graphic designer, partnered with Greater Together, a non-profit, to launch a flag contest which resulted in “The People’s Flag of Milwaukee”.

The public submitted 1,006 entries, from which five finalists were chosen in 2016. In an online poll of over 6,000 people, a design called “Sunrise Over the Lake” received the highest rating of the five. The flag’s design is described as follows:

The rising sun over Lake Michigan symbolizes a new day. The light blue bars in its reflection represent the city’s three rivers (...) and three founding towns (...). Gold represents our brewing history and white symbolizes peace.

The organizers of the contest released the redesign into the public domain, deciding to let the flag gain popular acceptance before pushing for official recognition. Since its introduction, the People’s Flag has been adopted by local businesses and used on commercial products from bicycles to microbrew labels. Despite popular enthusiasm for it, city officials have continued to delay official adoption of the design.



1927 - 1954



1954 -



The 2016 People's Flag of Milwaukee



5

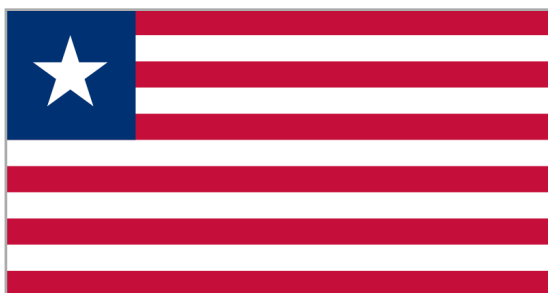
Be Distinctive or Be Related

*Avoid duplicating other flags, but use
similarities to show connections*

This is perhaps the most difficult principle, and yet maybe the most important one. Sometimes, the good designs happen to be already “taken”. However, flag designers can choose symbols, colors, and shapes that recall other flags as a powerful way to show heritage, solidarity, or connectedness. This requires knowledge of other flags.

Often, the best way to start the design process can be looking to one’s “roots” in flags—by country, tribe, or religion. Use some of the many resources available to help you with flag identification and history.

BE DISTINCTIVE OR BE RELATED - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Liberia

The close resemblance with the flag of the United States reflects the origins of the country, founded by freed American slaves.



Ethiopia

Having inspired the Pan-African colors used by many other African flags, Ethiopia's shows a strong connection with them. The star is the emblem of Ethiopia.

BE DISTINCTIVE OR BE RELATED - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Indonesia

Except for its proportions, this flag is exactly the same as Monaco's despite the fact that there is no connection between the two countries.

Upside-down, it is the same as Poland.



New Hampshire, U.S.A.

This flag is visually indistinguishable from over 20 other U.S. state flags that bear a seal on a blue field. Besides, can you tell how many flag design rules this flag breaks?

BE DISTINCTIVE OR BE RELATED - **GOOD FLAG DESIGN**



Guernsey

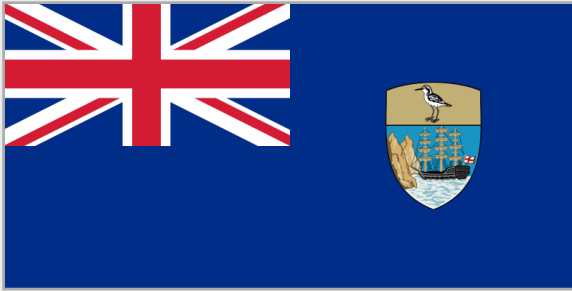
This flag's creation was prompted by confusion at international sporting events over competitors from Guernsey and England using the same flag. New flag, no more problems!



Aruba

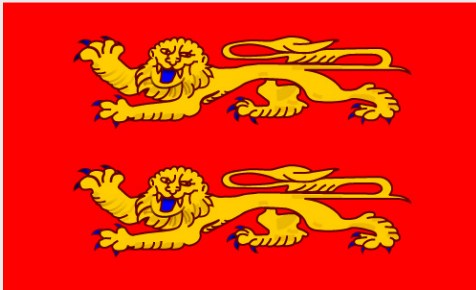
The flag uses the same structure as Curaçao, the neighboring island. The star representing the four cardinal directions refers to the many countries of origin of the people of Aruba.

BE DISTINCTIVE OR BE RELATED - **BAD FLAG DESIGN**



Saint Helena

Unlike Guernsey, the flag of Saint Helena looks exactly like most Commonwealth territories' flags, except for a badge based on Saint Helena's coat of arms.

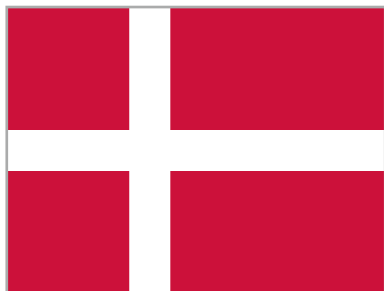


Lower Normandy, France

This flag is based on the arms attributed to William the Conqueror. Problem is, this flag is used both in Lower Normandy and Normandy as a whole.

Celebrate a common heritage

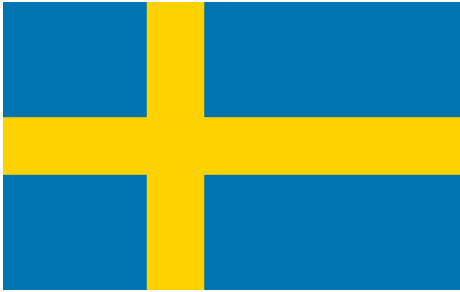
One shared design known around the world is the Nordic cross. Originated in Denmark, the distinctive cross is said to represent Christianity. Its most important feature is the off-centred nature of the vertical line, which is drawn slightly toward the hoist edge of the flag.



Denmark



Norway



Sweden



Finland



Iceland



Case study

*Nothing is better than a good
example to synthesize*

How to design a good flag



Amsterdam, Netherlands

Keep it simple

The flag of Amsterdam, Netherlands, is a great example of the first flag design rule: flags should be so simple that children can draw them from memory.

In his 2015 TED Talk *Why city flags may be the worst-designed thing you've never noticed*, Roman Mars said:

If you want to design a great flag, a kick-ass flag ... start by drawing a one-by-one-and-a-half-inch rectangle on a piece of paper. Your design has to fit within that tiny rectangle. Here's why: A three-by-five-foot flag on a pole 50 feet away looks about the same size as a one-by-one-and-a-half-inch rectangle seen about 15 inches from your eye. You'd be surprised by how compelling and simple the design can be when you hold yourself to that limitation.

Amsterdam's flag consists of three horizontal stripes (red-black-red) embellished with three white Saint Andrew's crosses. Simple as can be!

Use meaningful symbolism

Using the same horizontal stripes structure as the Netherlands flag, the capital of the

Netherlands allows a fast association between the two flags. But the most central element of this flag remains the three crosses in the center. The Saint Andrew's cross is a common element in vexillology, as seen in the flag of Tenerife, for example).

It is commonly said that the three crosses represent fire, floods, and the black plague, three issues that old Amsterdammers had to cope with a little too often. However, the crosses' true symbolism may have its origin in the arms of the noble Persijn family which once owned a large tract of land in the capital--knight Jan Persijn became lord of Amstelledamme (Amsterdam) in 1280.

The three Saint Andrew's crosses has been one of Amsterdam's most famous emblems ever since. You can find them carved into building bricks and sticking out of the city's street bollards. They appear on bus stops, museum signs, government logos, and official letters.

Use few basic colors

The flag of Amsterdam uses only three colors and thus obeys this elementary rule. Its colors derive primarily from the shield of Amsterdam's coat of arms. According to the city government, its origin could go back to the coat of arms of the Persijn family, which once owned a large tract of land in the capital.

These colors, as well as the crosses, appear in the flags of two neighbouring cities: Ouder-Amstel and Amstelveen.

Each color has a meaning. Red was initially meant to be orange to represent the royal family. Unfortunately, the orange dye originally used was quite unstable and would eventually turn red after exposure to the sun, leading the nation to change the official color to red.

In the coats of arms of two other Dutch cities, Dordrecht and Delft, the middle stripe symbolises water. In Amsterdam, the black stripe is for the River Amstel.

No Lettering or seals

The coat of arms of Amsterdam consists of a red shield and a black pale with three silver Saint Andrew's Crosses, the Imperial Crown of Austria, two golden lions, and the motto of Amsterdam. Several heraldic elements have their basis in the history of Amsterdam. The crown, just like the crosses, can be found as decorations on different locations.

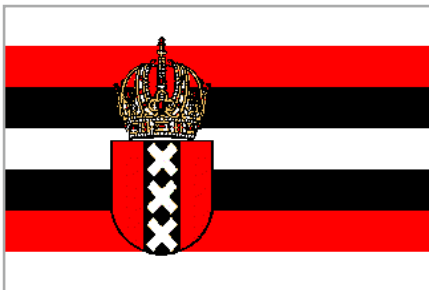
Under the shield is a white ribbon with the motto of Amsterdam: "Heldhaftig, Vastberaden, Barmhartig" meaning "Heroic, Steadfast, Compassionate". Queen Wilhelmina created it in 1947 to remember the role of the citizens of Amsterdam during World War II.



The coat of arms of Amsterdam



17th century - 1975



Variant used in the 17th century

Just like the Hungarian flag, the flag of Amsterdam has undergone various changes over the centuries to look as we know it today. To quote again the Roman Mars TED Talk:

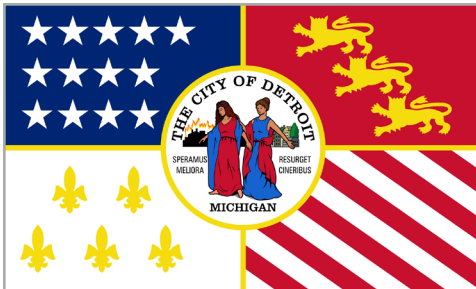
So this is the city coat of arms of Amsterdam. Now, if this were a United States city, the flag would probably look like (..) But instead, the flag of Amsterdam looks like this. Rather than plopping the whole coat of arms on a solid background and writing Amsterdam below it, they just take the key elements of the escutcheon, the shield, and they turn it into the most badass city flag in the world.

Be distinctive or be related

This flag is linked to its country and neighbouring cities, yet it stands out thanks to a unique and bold design. It has since become the pride of the people of the Venice of the North and a precious memory for many tourists.



How to design a bad flag



Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.

Keep it simple

When he designed this, he decided that he wanted to incorporate the city's full history. That's what the Detroit Historical Museum senior curator Joel Stone said about David Heineman, the creator of the Detroit flag.

It's a beautiful summary of what you have in front of you. A flag is certainly a wonderful medium to tell a story, but it shouldn't tell the *whole* story.

Being very involved with the city, he realized the city needed to have its own flag, and it had to be a very representative flag. It had to represent the city through the seal, which was already well established by that time (..) But it also had to be colorful and had to draw on the city's history. added Stone. Heineman was well-intentioned, unfortunately he didn't have this manual in his hands.

Use meaningful symbolism

This flag has a multitude of meaningful symbolism, but again the problem is that it contains too much. It's difficult to understand it from up close, so imagine seeing it on a flag pole. The flag has a quartered background, with each section representing a country that

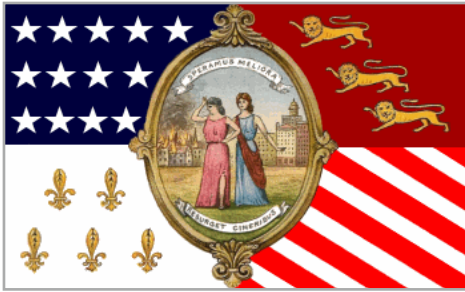
once controlled Detroit. The lower hoist (left) quarter represents France, which founded the fort and settlement in 1701; it has five gold fleurs-de-lys on a white field, imitating the Royal Standard of France. The upper fly (right) quarter represents Great Britain, which controlled the fort from 1760 to 1796; it has three gold lions on a red field, imitating the Royal Arms of England. The lower fly has 13 red and white stripes and the upper hoist has 13 white stars on a blue field, representing the original thirteen colonies of the United States.

The two Latin mottos read *Speramus Meliora* and *Resurget Cineribus*, meaning "We hope for better things" and "It will rise from the ashes", the words of the Catholic priest Gabriel Richard, written after the fire of 1805.

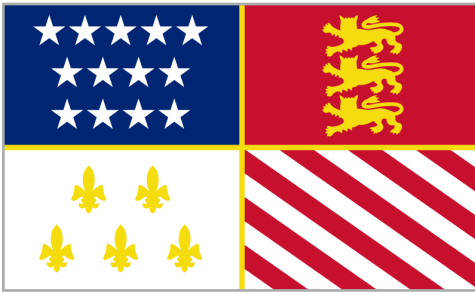
Use few basic colors

Had the flag only consisted of the quartered background (see middle right) with symbolism for the three countries, it would have been a little too colorful but not enough to appear in the list of bad flags.

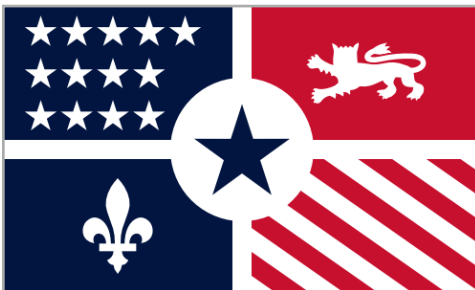
Unfortunately, the addition of the seal adds more than half a dozen colors that visually burden the flag. Heineman, in trying to represent the entire history of the city, included unnecessary elements such as the fire and the reconstruction of Detroit.



1948 - 1972



Seal-less (concept)



Simplified version (artist unknown)

The simplified version of the flag makes it right by keeping the essential meaning of the flag and limiting it to three colors.

No Lettering or seals

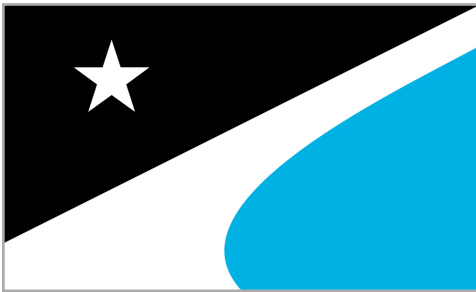
You've seen that one coming, right? The seal is a representation of the devastating Detroit Fire of June 11, 1805. Only one building survived. The figure on the left weeps over the destruction while the figure on the right gestures to the new city that will rise in its place. After all, the seal's symbolism is quite good!

However, once again, you should never put a whole seal on a flag. Especially if that seal contains four different texts. Like many U.S. city and state flags, it describes its symbolism with "The City of Detroit" and "Michigan".

Be distinctive or be related

Unlike the Amsterdam flag, that we have just studied, which has become an emblem of the city and a symbol of pride for the locals, the Detroit flag does not honor its city. Far too complex to be embraced by Detroit residents and the lovers of this city, today it is mostly known only to city historians.

Hopefully, Detroit's flag will follow the example of Milwaukee's, redesigned and enthusiastically adopted by the locals. Deon Mixon, a graphic design student at Western Michigan University, proposed a redesign of the flag in 2017(see below).



Deon Mixon's Detroit Rise Flag

Here's how Mixon describes the situation:
The city of Detroit is currently in a state of renovation, and for all its great effort to resurrect from a troubled past, it deserves a symbol of rebirth just as new as the ash it is gradually rising from. Detroit is in need of a new flag. Its current flag doesn't follow basic principles of good flag design. The design is too complex, it uses too many colors, and the city seal shouldn't be on it.

This redesign is a response to these issues and also to the citizens who don't even know their city has a flag.

This project aims to encourage the people of Detroit to adopt, fly, and embrace the new flag and to, especially, reassert the city's image.

As for the symbolism of his new design: The colors black, white, and blue represent resilience, righteousness, and progression, respectively. The points of the star represent Detroit's most successful industries: the automotive industry, music, art and design, life science, and high technology, and the white form symbolizes the Detroit River and the city's motto; it represents a rising from struggles the city endures and a path toward the better things the city hopes for and shall attain.



Conclusion

Congratulations, you now know everything you should know about flag design and the pitfalls you should avoid when creating one. Often, the best way to start the design process is to look into the history of what you wish to represent. Make use of the many resources available to help you with flag identification and history.

Do not hesitate to carry out the exercise with friends or family. You can take interest in the flag of your city (which, let's admit it, is most likely to be horrible) and try to redesign it with the new knowledge you've acquired. If you're lucky and tenacious enough, you will be able to change your local story.

And remember to always be curious when you see a flag!

CONCEPT: Ted Kaye and the North American Vexillological Association (the Flag Experts of the United States and Canada), Martin Joubert

EDITORS: Martin Joubert & Mégane Berthoux

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Martin Joubert - marth.fr

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