



Lockwood, with the winning flag in Wellington Photo: ROSS GIBLIN/FAIRFAX NZ

KYLE LOCKWOOD

UNLIKELY FLAG BEARER

The road to Kyle Lockwood's grandma's house is lined with flagpoles. There's a Merry Christmas flag, a Welsh Dragon, a skull and crossbones and a Union Jack. Where once flew Red Peaks, two poles stand empty. There must be more flagstuffs per person in Wellington's Breaker Bay than almost anywhere in the country. Where else, then, would the designer of New Zealand's alternative ensign have spent a good part of his childhood? At Kathy Lockwood's house overlooking Cook Strait, her grandson's black and blue referendum-winner flickers in the southerly breeze. Kathy won't lie though - she likes the red one better. Lockwood himself won't reveal which of his two final-five designs he ranked first. He's an old-fashioned kind of guy, he says. Not the kind to vote and tell. Even grandma doesn't know.

It's been a hell of a year for the 38-year-old Melbourne-based architectural designer, since two of his fern and stars designs were selected as finalists in September, for the first stage of the flag referendum. What's lesser known is that the good news actually started months earlier, in May, when the government announced a return to 10-year passports. Lockwood had spearheaded that campaign, organising a petition of almost 16,000 signatures. Does he have the Prime Minister on speed dial, then? Never met him, never spoken to him directly, Lockwood clarifies.

Back home for Christmas with the family, the quiet achiever has been thrust suddenly into the national media spotlight. At breakfast at a Wellington cafe there was staring and whispering. He fidgets and is uncomfortable discussing family. It is, he admits, all a bit odd. He's a fast learner, though. Jaded from waking at 4am for a breakfast television interview he still remembered a lint roller, to remove the caramel hair from Kathy's papillon dog that's now coating his suit jacket.

Underwater hockey, rather than the mighty All Blacks, got Lockwood hooked on the silver fern. His Dad represented New Zealand, sporting the frond on his tracksuit. His parents separated when he was small so Lockwood split his time between mother Barbara, father Simon and Kathy. On holidays, he would draw ships and planes as they passed Kathy's window. He was good at tech drawing and topped woodwork at Rongotai College, but drifted after school. A short army stint cemented his fern affection. He pulls out his beret and touches the gold fern badge that dates back to the Boer War. "I was actually more proud of that than I was of the flag flying over the parade grounds." It wasn't until 2000, though, that Lockwood drew the prototype of his winning design. By then he was studying architecture at Massey University, after four years' processing building consents for Wellington City Council. The lecturer was discussing attaching flagpoles to buildings and Lockwood drew a flag to go on top. "I thought - I don't know if I want to put a Union Jack up there. I just started sketching the silver fern with the Southern Cross. I sketched it and put it away in my books and it sat there for a good three or four years."

While he rejected the Union Jack, he's not a Republican. He also has a personal connection to the existing flag - Kathy and his late grandfather Walter served under it. Both Brits, the couple met in the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Walter had also fought under the British flag, but to Lockwood's surprise he still favoured his grandson's Union Jack-free replacement. "Initially I was quite scared as to what his reaction might be, because he was a sergeant in the RAF in the jungles of Burma. But he took one look at it and said 'That's it' in his very broad Yorkshire accent." Lockwood brought the design out again in 2004, for a Hutt News flag competition. His ensign won and got on *Campbell Live* and momentum has built ever since.

Lockwood had just got off the train from work when he heard his flag had won the referendum run-off. He was speechless. Kathy cried. He celebrated with bubbly but the rest is a blur. He reckons the race against the existing flag will be close, as Kiwis see them flying together and decide what better represents them in the 21st Century. His dream is to see his flag run up the pole at the Olympics. It hasn't all been dreamy, though. There have been critics aplenty, of the process and outcome. Lockwood avoids social media. To those who ask why we should accept a badge of identity designed by someone who doesn't live here, he says he's still a Kiwi through and through. He moved to Melbourne about seven years ago to work at Fender Katsalidis Architects, who design sustainable, modular commercial and residential buildings. He still has New Zealand citizenship, but hasn't yet got that 10-year passport. Lockwood thinks the process was sound and the public made a good decision. "Well you would, wouldn't you," Kathy laughs.