

AUSTRALIA

GENTLEMEN'S QUARTERLY

INTERVIEW

DAVID
POCOCK

FINALLY A FOOTY
PLAYER WITH A
DECENT OPINION

WINNING
OVER
NORTH
KOREA

(WITH BAD USTV)

136

STYLE TIPS TO SEE
YOU THROUGH
THE SEASON

GIRL

KEEPING
UP WITH
KENDALL

THE MEN OF
STYLE &
SUBSTANCE

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AHEAD OF THIS YEAR'S RUGBY WORLD CUP, WE MEET A 27-YEAR-OLD SPORTSMAN LIKE FEW OTHERS. A BEAST ON THE FIELD, A HUMANITARIAN OFF IT, WE'RE PROUD TO PRESENT A MAN TACKLING SOCIETAL ISSUES HEAD ON.

WORDS MIKE CHRISTENSEN PHOTOGRAPHY DAMIAN BENNETT

When a foxy player makes the tabloid headlines, the reason is usually not honourable. Drunk and disorderly on a plane; embroiled in a cocaine scandal; arrested for burglary. Or worse. And some serially offend. Enter rugby union's David Pocock, another who's racked up column inches for his off-field antics.

Except here, the headlines are inspirational. 'Refuses to wed girlfriend until gay friends have marriage equality'; 'Urges athletes to embrace inclusion after homophobia study'; 'In Maules Creek mine protest'.

Born into the turmoil that was Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Pocock nevertheless describes his upbringing as "pretty privileged". At least until 2002, when new legislation saw his family home targeted as one of the 2900 white, commercial farms to face eviction – the result of a land seizure that

reached an ugly climax. With neighbours of the same skin colour murdered in earshot, parents Andy and Jane decided to relocate then 14-year-old David, and younger brothers Mike and Steve, to Australia.

Ten years later, Pocock stood tall as the Wallabies rugby captain and a Young Australian of the Year finalist, owing to his philanthropic work back in Zimbabwe.

It was just the beginning. Today, following more headlines – 'Mine protest case dismissed'; 'Pocock should be applauded for standing up against homophobia', he texts ahead of his arrival, "Hi, just finished training. See you soon." Nice and polite – no abbreviations, no emojis.

The bell at the café's entrance does its job as someone enters. We turn and see a man gently closing it, wary Canberra's late-afternoon winter wind may slam it shut. It's Pocock.

A frame as wide as the one he's just squeezed through, he's dressed in trackies and a hoodie

– well presented but nothing fancy – sporting blades of grass and a week-old scab below his right eye. He smiles, puts down his phone and asks for some water. And so we begin.

GQ: Can you tell us a bit about your childhood, about Zimbabwe?

David Pocock: We lived on a farm 30km from a country town called Gweru. Dad's family had always farmed around there and Mum's farmed down near the South African border. In the '80s there was a fair bit of violence after the end of the civil war but when I started school in 1994, as a white kid, it was a pretty charmed upbringing. My school had black and white kids and the whole race thing was never really an issue.

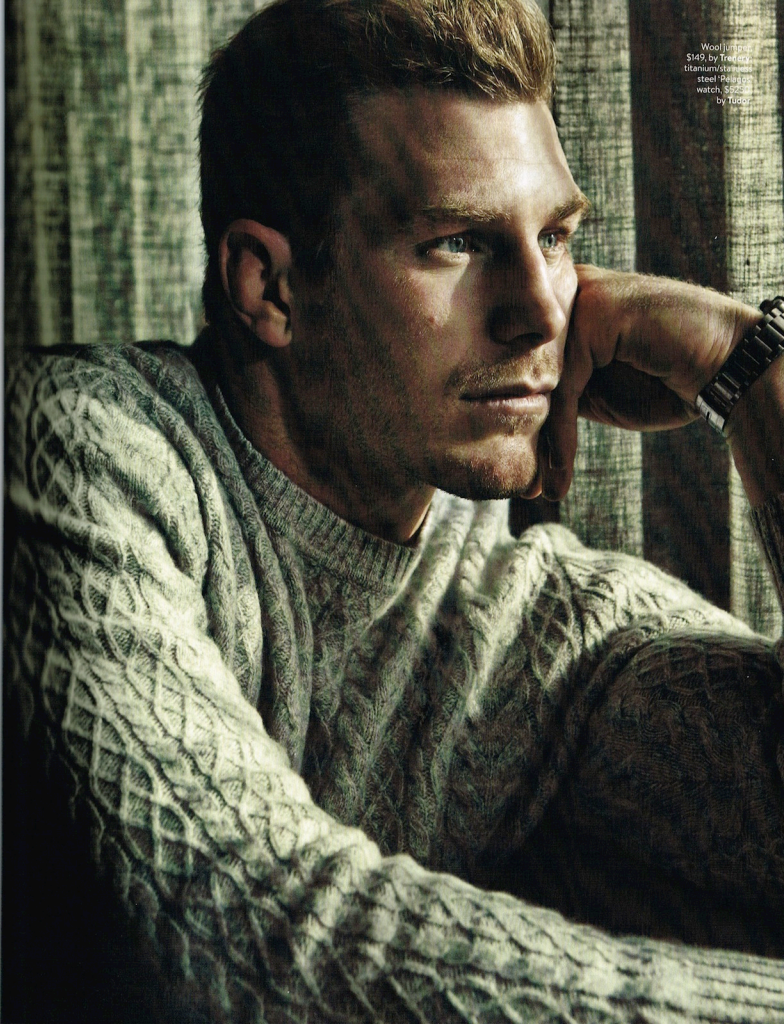
GQ: What happened in the early noughties, when the country's situation deteriorated?

DP: There was a vote on the new referendum and it was voted out. After that, the government started to talk about land reform and things started to really escalate.

GQ: Were you and your family ever in actual danger?

DP: A lot's been made of white farmers being in danger and sure, two farmers in our area were killed – one we were good friends with actually. And that's one of my clearest memories of that time. I was going over there about a month after the father and son had been ambushed at night, to see the mother – the son was still in hospital, the dad had been killed. And seeing the car sprayed with bullet marks and blood was like something out of a movie. But my biggest impression from that time was just how tough it was for [black] farm workers. They'd get beaten up and in the end it's estimated a million workers were left to move on and make

David Pocock

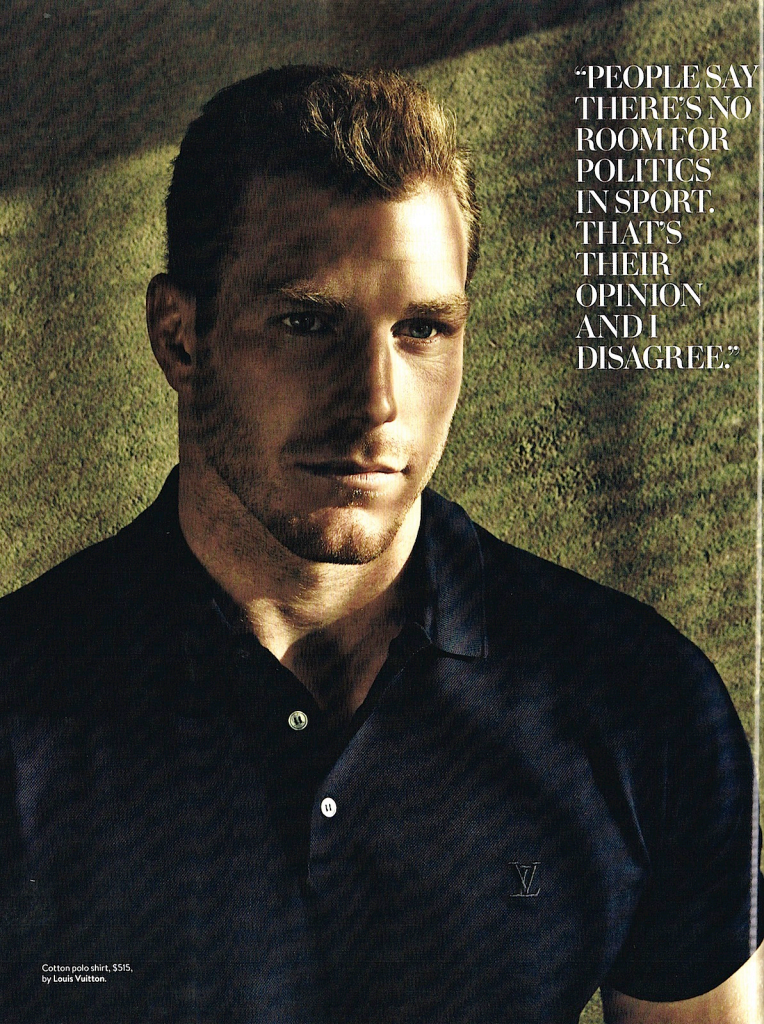


Woolly jumper: \$149, by Tredwell; titanium stainless steel watch: \$595, by Tudor

**"IF YOU DON'T THINK
PEOPLE SHOULD BE
DISCRIMINATED AGAINST
BECAUSE OF THEIR
SEXUALITY, THEN YOU
HAVE TO CHALLENGE
HOMOPHOBIA IN YOUR LIFE."**



Wood Jumper, \$150,
by Saba; cotton chinos,
\$99.95, by Toneroy;
suede desert boots,
\$700, by Vanishing
Elephant; titanium/
stainless steel "Pelagos"
watch, \$5250, by Tudor.



"PEOPLE SAY
THERE'S NO
ROOM FOR
POLITICS
IN SPORT.
THAT'S
THEIR
OPINION
AND I
DISAGREE."

Cotton polo shirt, \$515,
by Louis Vuitton.



Cotton 'Bronson' shirt, \$89.95, by **The Academy Brand**; cotton chinos, \$99.95, by **Trenery**; titanium/stainless steel 'Pelagos' watch, \$5250, by **Tudor**; leather belt, \$595, by **Salvatore Ferragamo**.

GQ: It must be fulfilling.

DP: It's been a great learning experience and I've tried to get back every year. It's one of those things where at the outset you aim to help people but you come out feeling like you've gained more from it and learnt so much. It's really given me a sense of perspective.

GQ: What's the hardest thing about running the charity?

DP: There's a tendency, when fundraising, to fall into the whole 'poverty porn' thing where the message is, 'these poor people desperately need your help.' Instead, we've tried to say, 'Look, these incredibly resilient, resourceful people have been battered by political and socio-economic issues but with some partnership, they've seen a huge change in basics like maternal health and pride in the community.'

GQ: And it's through such charity work that you met the former Archbishop Desmond Tutu earlier this year?

DP: A few years ago he did a promo video for us and from there we agreed that if our schedules coincided, we'd meet up. He's one of my heroes – I admire how he's put himself on the line for what he believes in. What he did for post-apartheid South Africa was such a big step in beginning the healing of the country. I just sat there next to him thinking, 'This is the most human person' – he's down-to-earth and has the best laugh.

GQ: And like your parents, you're still interested in farming?

DP: Yeah, I love getting my hands dirty and having that connection with the earth. I have a garden growing and when I was out injured [last year] it really kept me sane. It gives you that sense of seasonality

and that a lot of things are out of your control. The ecological side also appeals to me in terms of sustainably feeding people.

GQ: If you could, what would you challenge Tony Abbott on?

DP: In a time of global ecological crisis, we could have such a bigger vision for Australia; a vision that acknowledges these challenges and faces them head on. We're destroying our own land base, the Earth, which ultimately means we're destroying ourselves. That's a pretty massive criticism of Tony Abbott's ideology and prime ministership without even touching on his government, the cruelty to refugees and his use of fear as a political tool. It's disappointing, but as someone whose political views were formed in Zimbabwe, I can't say I started out with high hopes. It's up to us, as ordinary citizens, to start wresting control of

the political system back to the grassroots and away from corporations and billionaires who wield far too much power.

GQ: What's your end goal? Where do you see yourself next?

DP: I think about that quite a bit, but I don't have any answers. Lots of things interest me outside of rugby and I'd like to spend more time studying. Ems is involved in food sovereignty so we'll see where that goes too.

GQ: So you've proved Emma wrong about all rugby players being arseholes?

DP: She's definitely changed her tune [laughs]. We certainly don't help ourselves, but there's some nice guys out there.

GQ: What do those guys think about you doing a shoot for GQ?

DP: No one knows yet, but I'm sure someone will find it. And not a day goes by when there's not a ribbing about something, so it'll be funny. ■