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## Bridge Man, Dave Frieder's New Book Showcases His Art

**D**ave Frieder's new book, *The Magnificent Bridges of New York*, is the culmination of years of hard work — even if all those climbs to the tops of the towers were a true labor of love. As explored over recent years in pages of *Wire Rope News*, Frieder ultimately came to climb and photograph virtually all of the New York Metropolitan area's stunning spans.

The New York-born Frieder's enthusiasm for his work and awe-inspiring subjects — works of architectural and vital transport function — never flagged. And always, toward the end of each conversation was added the joy of telling me of the book he planned to complete.

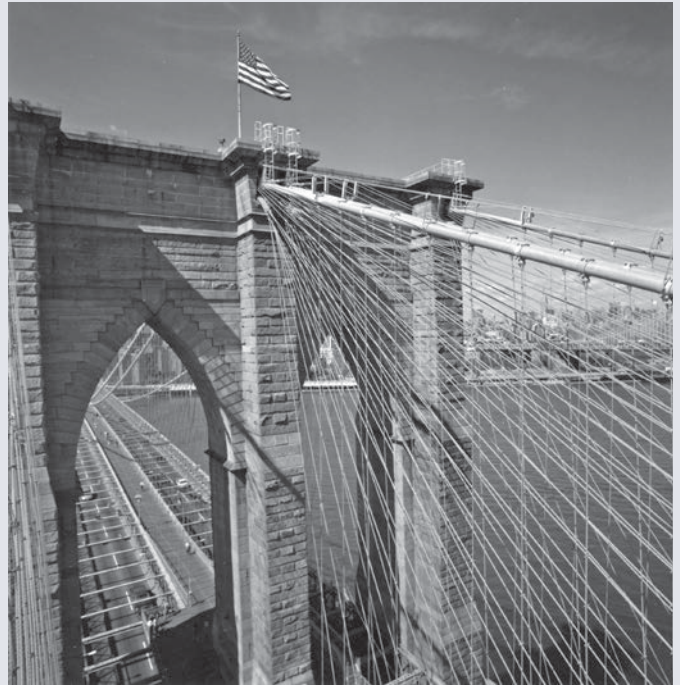
Recently I was happy to receive an email telling me the news. His book finally found publication. Frieder's new book is everything one could want about the bridges of NYC, including his stunning black and white photography. The city's bridges form such a vital part of the place's landscape. Many people can hardly separate them from this metropolitan area that could also not function without them.

In the crush of movement and activity defining the Big Apple, few people ever take the time to gaze up from cell phone texting to appreciate the intricate work done by armies of workers, planners, architects, engineers, visionaries, and even politicians in the creation of this world they find themselves in the midst of.

Dave Frieder has taken the time to gaze — and to climb and photograph the city's many bridges. I have contacted Dave over the past decade whenever I needed inside — and outside — information on the construction and history of such structures as the Brooklyn Bridge, George Washington Bridge or Verrazzano Narrows Bridge.

Frieder has always generously shared his time and expertise as well as his passion whenever I've called him. For years he has told me as well of a project near and dear to him, a book showcasing his work and that of those who completed work on these historic monumental artifacts from another age.

When pressed for clarification on which bridges were being discussed, Dave does not hesitate to clear things up. "I



Brooklyn Bridge: Brooklyn Tower Main Cables and Suspenders, 1996.

have photographed — and climbed some 20 Bridges," says Frieder. "And perhaps many people do not realize that there are actually 2,077 bridges in New York City.

"I only did the major bridges. All of those 20 bridges just mentioned are in the book. I did not do the old Kosciuszko bridge or the Alexander Hamilton. I actually never liked either of those two structures. However, I do like the new Kosciuszko Bridge but it was not completed when my book was ready for print. Maybe I'll get some images of that span if and when I do a second printing — if that ever happens."

Dave Frieder has a passion for each of the bridges included in his new coffee table book. His stunning photos harken back to the work of Ansel Adams, with black and white used as a medium creating life through shadow and brightness and everything in between which almost makes color beside the point.

Frieder places the iconic Brooklyn Bridge on the cover. But unlike countless other images of the world-famous suspension bridge, his photo showcases just one tower, the Brooklyn Tower — the Manhattan skyline in the distance almost looks diminished enough as to be from an earlier century. To the left the lovely arch of stonework stands unhindered, an open gate. But on the right archway is hemmed in by a spider's web of suspenders, wire ropes, and the huge main cable.

Washington Roebling, Chief Engineer on the project would happily recognize a different angle on the tower whose submarine construction nearly ended his life. A descendent, great, great grandson of Washington and Emily Roebling, does get to opine on Frieder's work.

"Without his fearlessness at great heights, coupled with his visionary command of the photographic medium, we would never have these amazing images to reintroduce us to the majesty of structures that are otherwise prone to the stultification of visual cliché," says Kriss Roebling. "I am grateful to Dave for leveling his artistic eye on my ancestors' crowning achievement from the vantage points that no average photographer would have the vision, or the courage to pursue.

"His daredevil capacity to capture the uncaptured image



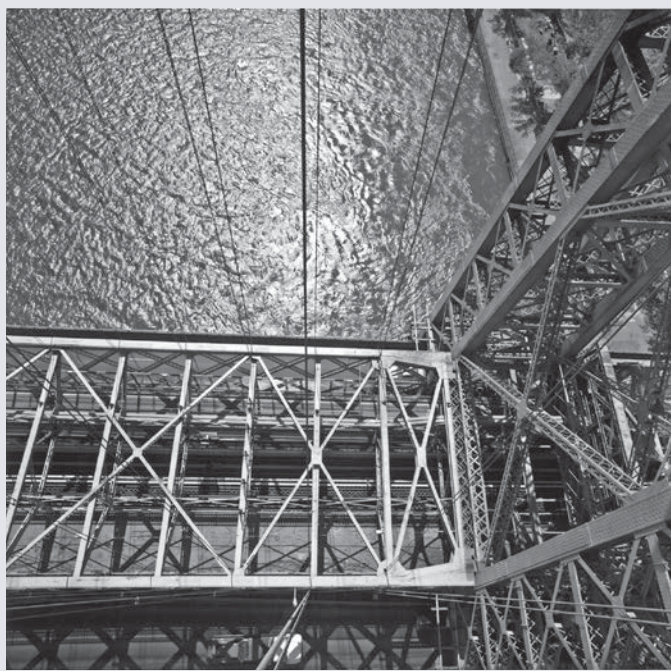
Manhattan Bridge: View of Lower Manhattan Skyline from Top of Sphere, Brooklyn Tower, 1997. All photographs copyright © Dave Frieder

reinvigorates the beauty of my ancestor's work. This work is now delivered once again from the realm of visual cliché."

Photography intrigued Dave Frieder long before he ever climbed any of New York's suspension bridges. And from the spectacular images provided by 20 different crossings, climb bridges he clearly has. On display in this book I am proud to now own, Frieder's knowledge of the design, structure, construction, history and background on this city's bridges shines through down to the minutest detail, such as wire being stored in starkly displayed. The reader can be content to take in those stunning views from their armchair or couch — and leave the climbing to Dave and his camera.

Though not an engineer by training, Frieder has more general knowledge of suspension bridge design and the work of the wire rope cables that make them possible than most involved with bridge engineering and design. He knows many of the factors involved in bridge construction, the varied features of each individual bridge and how they are put together to carry their enormous loads. This expert knowledge certainly applies to those structures scattered throughout the landscape of metropolitan New York.

"My dad gave me a little Brownie camera with the old 127 film when we moved from Queens, NY to New Jersey," explains Frieder. "Dad also encouraged me to try gymnastics.



Williamsburg Bridge "Downward View of Tower and Trusswork from Main Cables, 1999.

But at first I wasn't especially crazy about that idea. But in time I found that I liked it. "As my strength increased I started to excel in gymnastics in high school. I became a bit addicted to it — that and the New York City area bridges. I credit my father as the one who got me started in both gymnastics, photography and seeing the world around me through the lens of the camera."

Frieder's father pointed out the interesting photographic composition of the work of Ansel Adams. Frieder's admiration for the work of Adams was inspired by what his father said initially. Over time he spoke to many of the area's bridge engineers as well as an assistant of Adams, all leading to the eventual success in his idea to photograph the bridges.

"It was the work of all of these various individuals that inspired me to push this project through; civil engineers taught me a lot. But I eventually began to surpass them in my knowledge of bridge history and trivia."

Now, with Dave's new book, the culmination of all his photographic skill, physical prowess in scaling the bridges, and his factual knowledge of all there is to know about the bridges has come together in his book. Not one to scrimp on details, Frieder has assembled a veritable brief encyclopedia of all of the 20 bridges featured within the work's pages.

Since the building of a bridge is something analogous to the making of a movie, in the credits on a bridge's construction, the chief engineer may be best considered the director of the entire project, according to Frieder, who knows much about the ins and outs of bridge design and construction. Other positions are the engineer of design, assistant to the engineer of design and so forth. Perhaps one of the reasons that Dave Frieder is so successful at what he does is that he gravitates to work involving solo decision-making skills.

"Once when sitting for a filmed interview at the edge of the Hudson River below the George Washington Bridge, the sharp rocks where I was formed my seat — quite uncomfortable. I expressed to the director of the segment that I was in pain. He told me he didn't care.

"At that point I thought to myself that those in the acting profession can have their job. But not me."

Other on-going and more recent points Dave brings up include the replacement of the cast iron decorations on top of the Manhattan Bridge. The Department of Transportation is changing out the sphere-like objects which Frieder reminds us are actually unique finials, not spheres.

"They're originally crafted from cast iron back about 110 years. With that much time and weathering they have rusted and corroded enough for them to be considered too dangerous to actually try to repair.

"New ones have been made out of cast steel this time and in addition to the finials the entire stands beneath them will be replaced. The Queensborough Bridge has finials as well. They're a bit different than those on the Manhattan Bridge.

"I call these objects on top of the Queensborough Bridge Crowns as to me that is what they resemble. This fact makes it even easier to link the Crowns to the Queensborough Bridge which is a good fit."

Some five years ago, Dave Frieder was called in to offer additional information on the construction and structure of the Verrazzano Narrows Bridge upon the fiftieth anniversary of its opening. But ask about any other bridge and he also has a background on that one and a wealth of knowledge. For example, he found the Throgs Neck Bridge the toughest to photograph. Of all of New York's bridges it is rather generic, bland, and with few distinguishing characteristics. Even the nearby Whitestone Bridge, paralleling the Throgs Neck has more graceful rounded arches on its slender grey towers.

The Goethals Bridge — please pronounce it "GO-Thuls" — though the original span is no longer standing, now has a nearly identical sister structure, the Outerbridge Crossing. This latter bridge just a bit longer than the old Goethals, connecting New Jersey to the borough of Staten Island. The Outerbridge Crossing is slated as well to have a replacement cable stay bridge as the current bridge is structurally deficient.

Frieder was even the subject of a New York Times article on both his passion for the old time erector sets of his childhood and the fact that the chief engineer on the George Washington Bridge was actually influenced by his noticing his own little boy's playing with his erector set. Erector sets first came on the scene in 1913, less than 20 years before the opening of the GW Bridge.

The old Triborough Bridge, now called — at least by signs motorists must discover and navigate amid — the RFK Bridge, is one among a handful that have had ill-fated or

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confusing name changes. The Goethals Bridge, one that I recall as never seeming to have a visible landing place in Staten Island, is actually no longer in existence. But Dave's photos remain to remind us that the bridge, begun in the year that the Brooklyn Bridge's chief engineer died, is definitely no Brooklyn Bridge. It did serve its purpose during the 70 plus years it existed.

For example in 2002 alone, over 15.68 million vehicles crossed over the shallow waters of the Arthur Kill below on Goethals Bridge. New twin bridges opening in 2017 and 2018 now stand at the old bridge's location. Dave would like to someday get a second edition of his book out with photos of those new bridges.

As James Starace, P.E. Chief Engineer with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey relates, it's quite easy to take the bridges of NYC for granted. "They are often seen merely as structures whose sole purpose is to get us from one place to another as part of our daily travels, while the details of their grandeur goes unnoticed," says Starace. "Dave Frieder's photographs bring New York City's bridges to life by capturing the inherent beauty of these historic civil engineering landmarks."

"Othmar Ammann, master bridge designer and builder of many New York bridges Dave has photographed said 'It's not enough for a bridge to be functional, safe, and durable; it must also be beautiful.' Dave Frieder's photographs reflect the magnificence in these timeless structures."

Dave is adamant about a few final points being included. "I would mention that I do not like, nor will ever use these political name changes for the bridges. I have made over 100 Bridge climbs. That is all the bridges."

"Moving up a bit north of the Metropolitan Area, I have climbed and photographed the Bear Mountain bridge and the Mid-Hudson Bridge. But they are in New York State, not New York City. Bridge climbing, obviously, is not something too many people do. Despite this infrequency of span as-



Triborough Bridge, Lift Span, View of Randall's Island Tower and Clouds, Looking East, 1998.

cents, all of this work was done legally, by the book as well."

The Magnificent Bridges of New York City is one book I will return to many times both to learn more about New York's bridges and to recognize how photography can explain, enrapture, and capture the essence and mystery of a man-made structure, all at the same time.

The book can be ordered directly from Amazon (make sure you search with the correct title of the book) — and Dave welcomes any reviews — or from his website: [www.davefrieder.com](http://www.davefrieder.com). **WRN**

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**Cover photo:**

View of Upper Portal and Roadway, George Washington Bridge, New York Tower, 2008.