



AESTHETICS COMMENTARY

by Frederick Gottemoeller

Simplicity is usually a virtue in bridge aesthetics, particularly in a natural environment. At such sites, bridges are usually a small part of a much larger scene. Simple, easily understood shapes make a strong impact where fussy details would be lost in the background. Unfortunately, simplicity can also equal boredom. Those simple shapes must be refined in ways that add interest and grace. The Covered Bridge over the Kennebec River in Norridgewock, Maine, achieves that goal.

The shapes, including the cross bracing, are about as simple as they could be. At the same time, there is a lot of refinement here. The arch ribs taper from their thinnest point at midspan to match the tie girders at deck level. The cross braces have a subtle arch of their own. The dimensions and proportions are so thin that it's hard to believe that this is a concrete bridge. And the concrete allows simplicity at the joints, particularly at the arch rib-tie girder joint, that no other material could match. Finally, the thin cable hangers contrast dramatically with the concrete members of the bridge, giving the whole structure a light and open appearance.

A final refinement is the way the parapets carry in a continuous line across the whole bridge. They are inside the arch but outside the approach girders. Their overhang above the approach girders creates a shadow line that literally underlines the difference.

Concrete tied arches once appeared frequently along American roads. It is great to see that tradition revived with such a straightforward and graceful example.

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