The first part of the Pearl Harbor Bridge to be constructed, the northbound half, is sandwiched between the old bridge and a massive lift bridge. At this stage, it is hard to evaluate all of the facets of the design, but it is clear already that the designers have achieved a good visual relationship between the visual mass of the towers and the visual mass of the girders. The simple oval cylinders of the towers are visually strong shapes that make clear their central role in the support of the bridge. The sloped outside webs of the girders minimize their visual mass, so that they don’t overwhelm the towers. Meanwhile, the slight haunch at the piers makes clear that the girders play a major role in the support of the deck.

There were additional reasons to make the towers strong, simple shapes. The towers need to hold their own against the towers of the adjacent lift bridge, against the tanks and towers of the surrounding industrial landscape, and the sheer width and length of their own bridge deck. The visual strength of their shapes allows them to assert their importance in the scene.

Finally, the exposed stay anchorages along the edges of the girder create a repetitive rhythm of smaller elements and give the bridge some details that relate its scale to its neighbors. They also make clear how the bridge works by drawing the eye to the point where loads are transferred from the girders to the stays and thence to the towers.

Extradosed bridges are now on the drawing boards and a few are under construction. It will be interesting to see how designers address this bridge type’s aesthetic challenges.