

Beyond Color: Reimagining an Icon - The 36 Views of the Golden Gate Bridge

By: Jon Swindall | January 27, 2025



Arthur Drooker's "36 Views of the Golden Gate Bridge" reimagines California's icon. Discover what he shares in our conversation.

In a world where an estimated 10 million photographs are taken annually of the Golden Gate Bridge, photographer Arthur Drooker embarked on an ambitious project to make us see this iconic structure anew.

Drawing inspiration from the 19th-century Japanese artist Katushika Hokusai's famous series of Mount Fuji, Drooker set out to create his own "36 Views" – not of a mountain, but of one of the world's most photographed bridges – The Golden Gate Bridge.



Breaking Through Visual Numbness

“The Golden Gate Bridge is arguably the most photographed bridge in the world,” Drooker reflects. “After a while, it creates what I call visual numbness. You don’t really see the bridge anymore. Your eye registers in a nanosecond – ‘Oh yeah, the Golden Gate Bridge’ – and then you move on. You’re not really looking at the bridge.”

This observation became the catalyst for a bold artistic choice: presenting the bridge entirely in black and white.

“When you do that, you are challenging the viewer. You’re making the viewer work a little harder,” Drooker explains. “And when it’s something as familiar as the Golden Gate Bridge, you’re going to see things in that bridge you never saw before.”

The Hokusai Connection

The decision to create exactly 36 views wasn’t arbitrary. Drooker drew inspiration from Hokusai’s renowned series of Mount Fuji woodblock prints. “Each one was from a different perspective, near, close, different times of the year – in terms of seasons, different types of weather. The cumulative effect is seeing Mount Fuji in a very intimate way. You get to see the moods of the mountain,” he explains. “I thought that was a great way to approach photographing the Golden Gate Bridge.”

THE LUMINOUS LANDSCAPE

The Photographer's Knowledge Resource



A Project Takes Shape

Over two to three years, Drooker meticulously built his collection. From nearly a hundred images he considered “book-worthy,” he carefully curated the final 36.

“To me, a sequence should only be as long as the number of photographs you need to tell that story,” he reflects. “I found 36 to be a great number. It really imposes a sense of discipline and order on what you’re doing.”

The Art of Selection

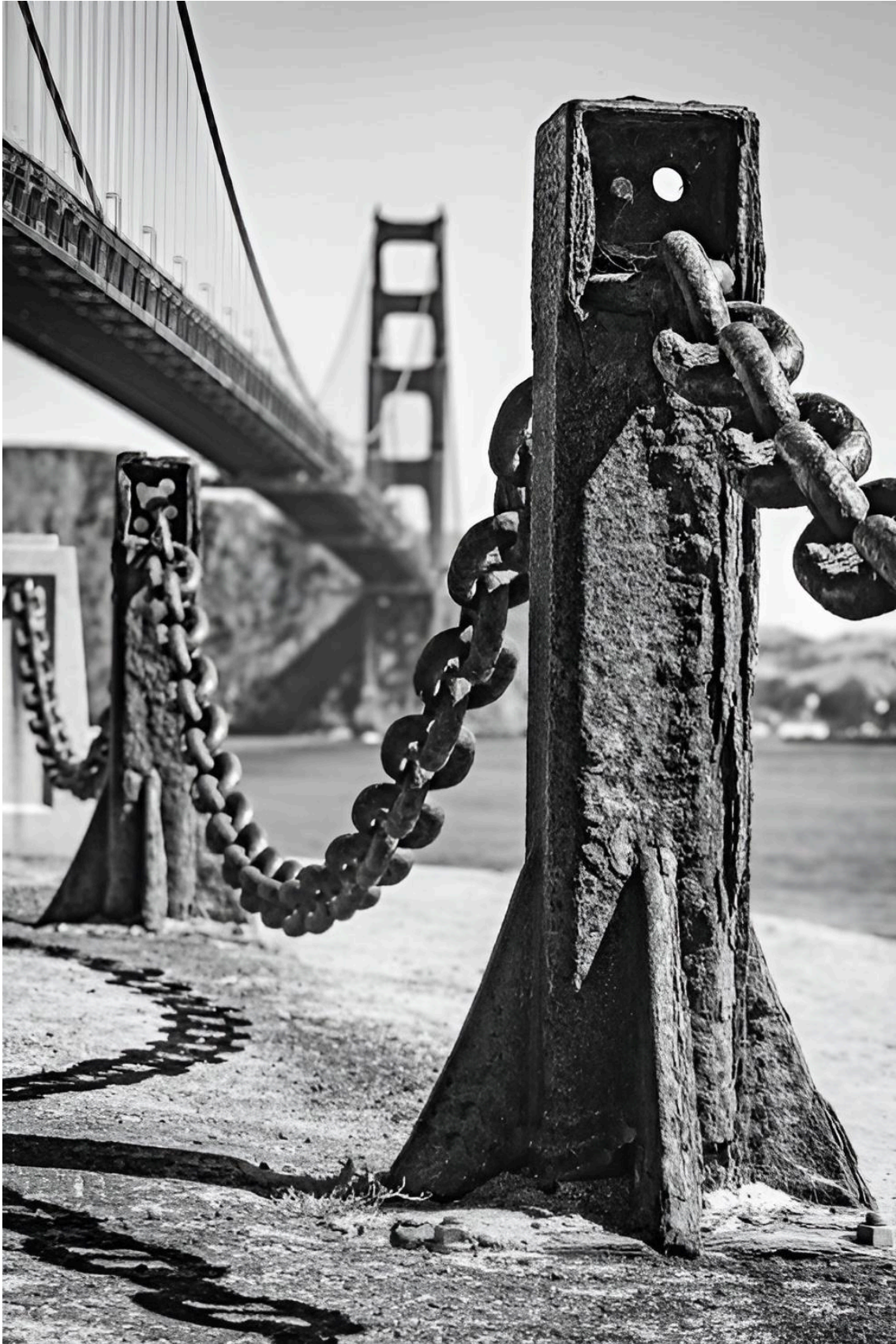
The curation process revealed something unexpected. “At a certain point, the project starts talking back to you,” Drooker shares. “It tells you what it is. It tells you what it needs and what would work and what wouldn’t work. It’s almost like it’s dialoguing with you as its own entity, even though you are the one creating it.”

This dialogue led to difficult but necessary decisions. “There are some photos that did not make it into the book that I love, but quite frankly, didn’t contribute to the overall narrative flow,” he admits. “You’ve got to pay attention to that. You really do.”

Beyond the Postcard

Drooker deliberately avoided typical postcard angles, seeking instead to capture perspectives that might surprise even longtime San Francisco residents. “If you want to see a postcard shot of the Golden Gate Bridge, just go online,” he notes.

“I didn’t want to do that shot. They’ve already been taken. It was very important for me not to shoot what would be a typical postcard shot.”



A New Vision Emerges

Through this methodical approach, Drooker's project achieves something remarkable – it makes us pause and truly see an icon we thought we knew. By stripping away the familiar orange hue and forcing us to consider form, light, and shadow, he reveals the bridge anew through each carefully chosen perspective.

The resulting collection doesn't just document a structure; it explores the many ways we can experience a single subject when we take the time to really look. In doing so, Drooker reminds us that even the most photographed subjects can reveal new secrets when viewed through fresh eyes.

This is Part 1 of a 3-part series exploring Arthur Drooker's "36 Views of the Golden Gate Bridge" project. Coming next: "Capturing the Unseen: The Quest for the Perfect Shot"