



Arıoğlu wondered three decades ago if a suspension bridge could cross such a windy strait.
Photo courtesy of Yapi Merkezi

Ersin Arıoğlu: Building Partnerships to Make Record-Setting Dardenelles Bridge Possible

[Aileen Cho](#)

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Freshly armed in 1963 with a master's degree in civil engineering from Istanbul Technical University, a young Ersin Arıoğlu and a partner had a daunting task: reinforce, upgrade and make an iconic contribution to Istanbul's silhouette out of the Galata Tower, a building dating back to the Ottoman Empire.

"This project, with both of us being at the ages of 23 and 24, laid a very heavy responsibility on our shoulders," he says.

Arıoğlu recalls he then had a dream in which he asked Mimar Sinan, the chief architect of the Ottoman Empire between 1539 and 1588, for advice. Sinan told him: "Don't ask me, ask the building."

So Arıoğlu did. "I discovered that I could almost feel the building's centuries-old agonies and plight under the loads it was carrying as if through my own muscles, tendons and bones," he recalls. "I would then ask myself which form would I take should loads be imposed on me, and how could I transfer loads to the ground? The sensation awakening in my muscles inspired the solution. It seemed as if I was developing empathy with the structure and the ground."

That empathy has served him well ever since, including with clients and partners of the construction firm he founded with his colleague on the Galata Tower project. And Arıoğlu had another, more conscious dream when he visited his mother's hometown in the Dardanelles Straits region. "When I passed the engineering school exams and became an engineering student, I started to think more deeply about what kind of bridge should be there. This dream continued in my mind for almost 30 years."

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Fulfilling a Dream

Together with his mentor Prof. Semih Tezcan, who served as president of Boğaziçi University, in 1992 Arıoğlu presented a proposal to Turkey's General Directorate of Highways, and then at a suspension bridge conference in Oslo, Norway in 1994.

"The main span of that imaginary bridge was 1,510 meters," says Arıoğlu. "Our courage was not enough to imagine a bridge with a span greater than that."

The proposal evolved with the input of other suspension bridge experts, with the construction of two bridges over the Bosphorus Strait, and with the evolution of suspension bridge engineering that led to the world-breaking 1,992-meter-long span of the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge in Japan.

Now Arıoğlu's dream is coming true, thanks to an international collaboration that includes COWI as the lead designer, and Turkey's Limak and South Korea's DL E&C and SK ecoplant as joint venture partners in the construction of the 1915 Çanakkale Bridge, which will set a new suspension main-span record of 2,023 meters.

"He always shared his approach with the project team, which was very helpful for us," says Resit Yildiz, executive committee member with the joint venture. "He attended all the meetings with main designer candidates during our selection process—a solid indication of the emphasis he gives to design and engineering. His wisdom and extensive experience guided us through the project. We are happy to make his Çanakkale Bridge dream come true."



Aileen Cho, ENR's senior transportation editor, is a native of Los Angeles and recovering New Yorker. She studied English and theater at Occidental College, where a reporter teaching the one existing journalism course encouraged her to apply for the LA Times Minority Editing Training Program. Her journalism training led to her first stories about transportation, working as a cub reporter with the Greenwich Time. Her work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times and New York Times. Many of her experiences with engineers and contractors have inspired material for her alternative theater productions way, way off Broadway. For ENR, Aileen has traveled the world, clambering over bridges in China, touring an airport in Abu Dhabi and descending into dark subway tunnels in New York City. She is a regular at transportation conferences, where she finds that airport and mass transit engineers really know how to have fun. Aileen is always eager to hop on another flight because there are so many interesting projects and people, and she gets tired of throwing her cats off her computer in her home office in Long Beach, California. She is a very conflicted Mets/Dodgers fan.