

The Nihonbashi Bridge marks the symbolic centre point of Japan. On the left is a historic picture from the early 19th century when the bridge was still made of wood. In the middle: the bridge in the 1930s. The picture on the right shows the present bridge with an expressway running over it.

Centre point of Japan



Kärcher cleans the historically significant Nihonbashi Bridge in Tokyo – Nationwide reports

If credence is given to a well-known saying, all roads lead to Rome. In Japan, however, since the early seventeenth century all roads have led to the Nihonbashi Bridge. In the days of the Tokugawa shogunate, it was the starting point of all major trading routes. The majority of goods were transported along these routes, but they were also used by a large number of travellers because ships as a mode of transport were reserved exclusively for the ruling class. The bridge, built in 1603, was therefore the symbolic centre point of the country. On the roadway in the middle of the bridge, a bronze plaque still marks the point

zero. The distances from and to Tokyo shown on Japanese highway signs are measured from here.

In 1911 the bridge was rebuilt in fireproof granite

The original wooden bridge burnt down several times over the centuries, so when the bridge was last rebuilt in 1911 the material of choice was granite. However, it was not dirt-proof. As time passed, dust, mosses and algae deposits built up on the 52-metre long and 30-metre wide structure, forming encrustations up to

2 mm thick in parts. Traffic emissions from the expressway that runs across the bridge did further damage.

In order to spruce up the stony Nihonbashi Bridge appropriately in time for its 100th anniversary, a German-Japanese team from Kärcher took it in hand. Application technician Thorsten Möwes and his Winnenden colleague Jörg Wagner were there, while Kenro Otsuka and Hiroki Muraoka travelled to Tokyo from Sendai, where our Japanese subsidiary is located.

Before they started work, a traditional Shinto ceremony was held, as is done in Japan to solicit support and goodwill from the gods. The auspices



A Shinto ceremony and a press conference with Kärcher Japan's Managing Director Hachiro Sato marked the start of the Nihonbashi Bridge cleaning works. The bridge was given a preliminary clean with pressure washers.

for the project were evidently good, judging by the great public interest shown in the subsequent press conference. Over fifty media representatives came to hear about the cleaning operation and reported the project launch nationwide in print media and on TV.

Combined cleaning methods for most efficient gentle treatment

A combination of pressure washing and low-pressure particle blasting had proven to be the most efficient and gentle beauty treatment for the granite, which was already cracked and flaking in places.

Our team started by giving the bridge a preliminary clean with pressure washers and water at around 100 °C. They then used GS blasting guns to carefully remove the remain-

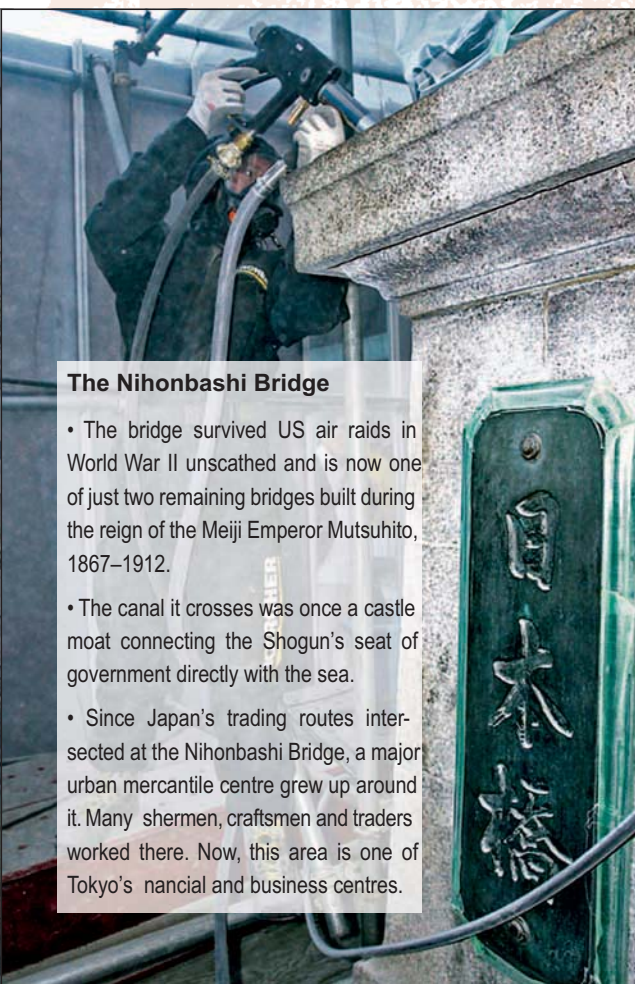
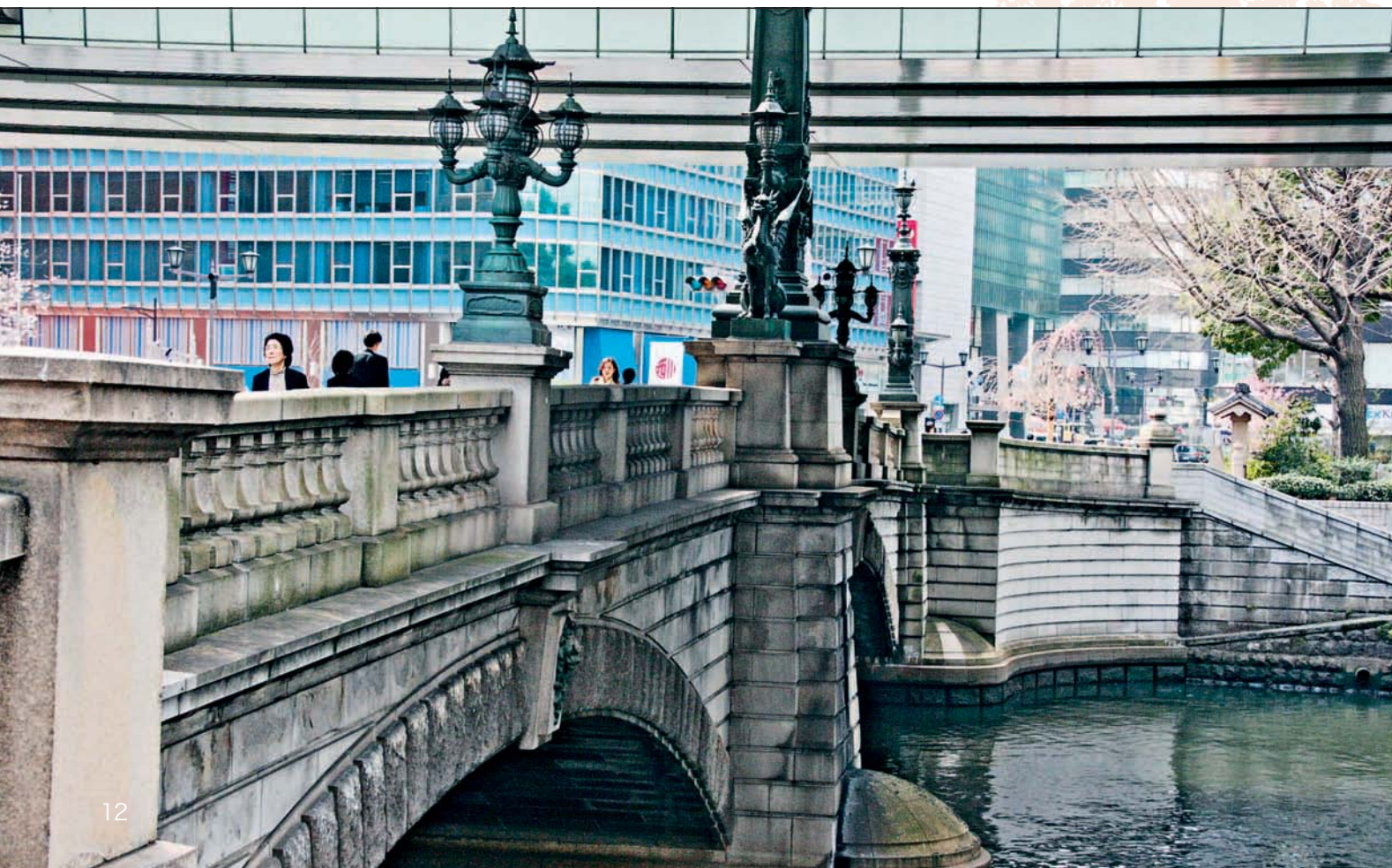
ing dirt and discolouration, using calcium carbonate and aluminium silicate as a blasting medium. "To subject the environment to as little strain as possible we used wet and dry vacuums to vacuum up the blasting medium again immediately," said Thorsten Möwes. "Then we rinsed off any residue on the surface with HDS 13/15 hot-water pressure washers."

Sato: "Emblem of our country for centuries"

After a six week work the cleaning of the bridge was finished. „As a symbolic centre, this structure has been an emblem of our country for centuries," said Hachiro Sato, Managing Director of Kärcher Japan. „So we are very proud to have been involved with the history of the Nihonbashi Bridge."

The Tokugawa shogunate

"Shogun" was a Japanese military title for leaders of the military aristocracy, the samurai. Originally, a shogun was roughly equivalent to a European duke. In the early seventeenth century, the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu rose to become the de facto ruler of Japan, holding power in place of the Emperor and securing it by military means. He set about uniting Japan and established the Tokugawa shogunate, which lasted nearly 270 years from 1603 until 1867. During that era the country experienced the longest period of peace in its history. Tokugawa Ieyasu moved the capital from the old imperial city of Kyoto to Edo, now Tokyo, where the Nihonbashi Bridge was built at the beginning of his reign.



The Nihonbashi Bridge

- The bridge survived US air raids in World War II unscathed and is now one of just two remaining bridges built during the reign of the Meiji Emperor Mutsuhito, 1867–1912.
- The canal it crosses was once a castle moat connecting the Shogun's seat of government directly with the sea.
- Since Japan's trading routes intersected at the Nihonbashi Bridge, a major urban mercantile centre grew up around it. Many shermen, craftsmen and traders worked there. Now, this area is one of Tokyo's nancial and business centres.

