

BUILDING CONSIDERATIONS



HAKUBA
REAL ESTATE

BUILDING CONSIDERATIONS IN HAKUBA VALLEY

Hakuba is a pristine destination renowned for its natural beauty and snowfall with around 8 metres of snow falling annually. When designing and building a home in such an Alpine environment, it is important to take into consideration the effect these conditions will have on your property.

This may seem straightforward and knowledge you would expect from your architect and builder. Do note that warm weather architects may overlook some of these important considerations. For this reason, some Hakuba builders are wary of working with Tokyo architects who may not fully comprehend the requirements of building in an alpine environment.

CONSIDER YOUR ENVIRONMENT

In the initial discussion stages, it is imperative to discuss construction to prepare for the harsh seasons and the impact it will have on your property. Be sure to ask lots of questions and listen to your local builder and their advice on snow issues. They will know best! They work in this environment day in, day out and have therefore witnessed many mistakes or design flaws that can be easily prevented.

THINK LONG TERM

Taking the alpine conditions into consideration may have an impact on your building bottom line that may affect your budget. However, this will be money spent well for the long term. You will in return have a home that is prepared to withstand the elements, as opposed to one requiring additional work down the track due to bad planning.

We have compiled some simple rules and guidelines to consider when designing an alpine property. Discuss these with your architect and builder so you can avoid any issues and enjoy living in your well-designed alpine home.

#1 UNCOVERED DECKS

In your visions of a deck, make sure its covered! Timber decks have a short lifespan in this environment and unless covered, will cost you ongoing maintenance and repairs. Snow clearing, re-staining, replacing damaged boards, handrail repairs and replacement are all costs to expect with a non-covered timber deck.

If design does not allow for a roof or covered deck, consider a material other than timber for the deck or patio, such as stone or concrete.

#2 AVOID NORTH-FACING GLASS

New contemporary designs and large windows are a common request in alpine designs. Almost all the clients building in Hakuba come from warm weather climates such as South-East Asia or Australia, so are keen to make the most of the snowy view. In an alpine environment, low temperatures and aspect make a considerable difference in design compared to orientation in the tropics.

Floor to ceiling glass, regardless of the building's orientation is a gamble. North facing glass sees no direct sun and is hit with the cold storms. This will result in a dramatic increase in your running costs. It can also create drafts as cold air runs down the face of the glass wall. Even "low-e" glass or triple glaze is no substitute for a fully insulated wall.

#3 GLASS & INSULATION

Glass and insulation have numerous options in regards to level of quality and expense. Therefore, they can be an easy way to attempt to cut down final costs of your build. Yet in turn, skimping on these costs can lead to more hassles, and much bigger costs down the track. Upgrading the specifications on both glass and insulation once your home is complete can be a very expensive and difficult process.

With glass and insulation spec always on the improve and new technology forever evolving, it is important to understand your options. For a small percentage of your overall build cost, money spent on glass and insulation is often the best investment you will make during the build process. Furthermore, you will continue to see the long-term benefits with low ongoing energy costs.

#4 ROOF ANGLE / DIRECTION / FLAT ROOFS

Roof pitch in an alpine environment is another very important consideration that can affect snow loading, snow depositing and the general aesthetics of your home. Understanding when and where the roof snow will deposit is very important as it can affect yourself as an owner, guests and even neighbors.

Although common in more 'contemporary designs' flat or low angle roofs may need manual snow clearing. If opting for such a design, you will need to factor in and conduct comprehensive research into the structure and water proofing membranes as well as various other considerations. Dormant roof snow acts very differently depending on outside temperatures and the internal heating schedule of the building.

#5 SERVICES

Plan for your services from the start of your design to minimize visual impact and maintain the design aesthetics (as well as avoiding any management difficulties).

Boilers, heat pumps, propane bottles, electrical wires and fuel tanks all take up space, but can be concealed easily enough if well planned. Taking these services into your design considerations will make the world of difference to visual appeal and make management of your property a breeze.

#6 PARKING

When designing your new home, many people's thoughts are on maximizing your footprint and minimizing parking or garage space. However, in an alpine environment, it is very important to consider where you will park during the winter months. Consider roof snow, snow clearing, your number of cars and ease of access.

A garage will add to build cost and may not make a great difference to the yield of your property, yet it is money well spent in this environment.

#7 DRAINAGE

With up to 10 metres of annual snow fall and healthy precipitation through the green season, drainage is another important consideration when building a new home.

There is a tremendous amount of water moving through the top soil during the meltdown months and when it rains. Be sure to install proper drainage pipes, waterproof the foundations, and have good ventilation for basement areas. Drainage pipes are an easy initial cost saving, but will be more expensive trying to retro fit or rectify issues at a later date. Be sure you, your builder and your architect understand the potential of water issues surrounding your lot.

