

The principal materials used in staircase production are plywood, followed by laminated veneer lumber for higher-end products. This pattern will continue, due to the well entrenched and diversified nature of the laminated products industry in Japan.

Imports

There are no import statistics available for staircases. Imported staircases are listed under a category titled "carpentry of wood" in the Ministry of Treasury's trade statistics (see Table 17).

Table 17

"Carpentry of Wood" Imports

Year	Quantity (^{'000} kg)	Value (^{'000} ¥)
1982	3 723	1 356
1983	4 552	1 657
1984	5 451	1 901
1985	6 755	2 172
1986	12 571	2 798
1987	23 500	4 721
1988	8 258	1 607
1989 est.	12 513	2 597

Source: Ministry of Treasury.

As of 1988, the top two countries exporting staircases to Japan were Canada and the United States. Canada's share is nearly 30 per cent of Japan's total staircase imports, by volume, closely followed by the U.S. with 29 per cent. However, U.S. imports were expected to exceed Canadian imports in 1989.

At present, the fairly well-recognized brands in Japan are those of the U.S. companies Morgan, Coffman and Western Turning. Morgan staircases are imported by several companies, including ABC Development and Santa Tsusho, Coffman and Western Turning are handled by Fronville Home Company.

Although none of these brands control a significant share in Japan, Morgan is said to have a leading position in the imported staircase market.

Though importers handle a variety of staircases and related components, the most common type are the straight-type stairs. The market for spiral and circular staircases is very limited.

Demand Trends

There are no "best-selling" staircases as such. A very popular line of staircases, however, is offered by Juken Sangyo, one of the market leaders. These are made with laminated veneer lumber (LVL), a relatively new plywood technology.

In design terms, preferences still lean towards the simple Japanese box-type staircases. Unlike western-style houses, staircases in Japanese homes are installed in non-visible locations. This practice is primarily due to space restrictions of the average Japanese home. The importance attached to the decorative design work of staircases is, therefore, minimal.

Supported by the favourable production growth of prefabricated houses, demand for staircases will likely remain strong. Little change is expected in terms of design work.

Currently, one target market for imported hardwood staircases is the commercial building sector — primarily boutiques and restaurants — where visual appeal is highly valued.

Standards and Regulations

There are no specific standards that apply to staircases. The building code, however, regulates depth of tread, rise height, and depth of landing for different kinds of buildings (see Table 18).

Table 18

Building Code Regulations

Building Type	Tread Depth	Rise Height	Depth of Landing
Elementary Schools	≥ 26 cm	≤ 16 cm	≥ 140 cm
Public Buildings	≥ 26 cm	≤ 18 cm	≥ 140 cm
Single-Family Homes	≥ 15 cm	≤ 23 cm	≥ 75 cm