

Hياما

Every gassho-style house in Shirakawa-go has an irori fireplace, above which hangs a wooden board suspended from the main crossbeams of the house and colored black by soot from the fire underneath. This board, or hياما, traditionally had many uses. Tools could be stored on top of it, or food could be hung from it to be smoked. The hياما's primary function, however, was to extinguish sparks rising from the fire before they reached the ceiling, walls or, worse, the thatched roof, starting a blaze that could threaten the entire village. The hياما also helped dissipate smoke throughout the house while preventing heat from dispersing, keeping the area around the irori warm even in the dead of winter.