

Glass Block Windows Buyer's Guide



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When considering new windows for your home, you should know you aren't limited to traditional pane-glass windows, and that in fact those may not be the best choices for certain places such as your basement and bathrooms. In this buyer's guide, we'll explore an often-overlooked design, glass block windows, and examine their benefits. You may be surprised at how glass block windows can enhance your home and save you money on your energy bills.

Introduction to Glass Block Windows

Glass block windows were developed in the late Victorian era in order to allow daylight into areas where traditional pane-glass windows would be unsafe due to how easily they could be broken. They were first used in factories, workshops, and underground spaces. A few decades later, when Art Deco architecture was in style, glass block windows gained widespread popularity and use in both commercial and residential building. Even today, architects utilize glass blocks in their work, like Maison Hermes in Tokyo, which you can see here.

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Glass block windows are made with pieces of recycled glass that are melted together with sand, soda ash, and limestone. The molten glass is poured into molds that give the blocks a variety of patterns. Dyes can also be added to the mix. This combination of patterns and colors affect the way light passes through the glass blocks, allowing consumers a wide array of choices, well beyond what pane-glass windows can offer.

If the manufacturing process interests you, [here's a video](#) showing one way glass blocks are made.

Benefits of Buying Glass Block Windows



There are a number of advantages that come with installing glass block windows in your home, which we'll be discussing in this section. Specifically, we'll look at the two places glass block windows are most often used, and why.

In the Basement

For many people, the first thing that comes to mind when glass block windows are mentioned is their use in residential basements. Glass block basement windows have become a staple of home building and renovation. Here are glass blocks' most notable benefits that lend themselves so well to this space:

Durability

The outside of your home, especially at ground level, is subject to the worst the weather has to offer. For pane-glass windows, this can mean cracks and breaks, rotten or corroded sashes and frames, failing grout and caulk, etc. Because glass blocks are thick and mortared in without frames, they aren't subject to any of those things. This means a longer service life with less maintenance. Also, because of their density, they're less likely than pane-glass windows to crack when your house settles.

Insulation



As anyone living in Michigan knows, a basement can be uncomfortably cold or unbearably warm and muggy depending on the season. Both of these can be mitigated by better insulation, and in a basement, this largely depends on windows. Glass block basement windows, by virtue of their thickness and lack of caulk and weather stripping that can have gaps or fail, naturally insulate better than pane-glass. There's a bigger buffer between the inside and outside environments and less air can pass from one to the other.

Modern glass block windows can be made with "low-e" glass, making it even better at insulating your home. We'll talk in a bit about another advantage of this insulation: saving you money on your energy bills.

Sometimes you want to get fresh air into your basement, though, and glass block windows can be installed with vents you can open, giving you the best part of a traditional window along with all the benefits of glass blocks.

Security

Pane-glass basement windows can be an attractive target for potential burglars. They can work on basement windows while crouched down, not being as visible. Traditional windows don't pose much of a challenge.

Glass block windows, on the other hand, are so difficult to get through that they aren't worth the effort to a criminal. As mentioned above, glass block windows don't have sashes to pry or thin panes that can be broken out easily.



In the Bathroom

A less obvious but equally fitting place to use glass block windows is in your bathroom. In addition to the benefits described above, glass block windows have specific qualities making them ideal for bathrooms.

Privacy

Things appear distorted when looking through glass blocks. The degree of this distortion depends on the thickness and the pattern imprinted during manufacturing. What this means is that you don't need to cover glass block windows with drapes or blinds to maintain your privacy. And if there's one place in your home where privacy is a top priority, it's the bathroom.

Atmosphere

The same distortion that protects you from people peering in also lets light filter in gently and smoothly, diffusing sunlight in pleasing tones instead of glaring beams. This produces a great atmosphere for you to relax in the tub. And in the same way glass block windows insulate from the weather, they also provide a better barrier against noise than traditional windows, adding to the overall peaceful aura.

Water Resistance

The wetness and humidity typical of a bathroom can be extremely taxing on the materials around pane-glass windows, reducing their overall lifespan and increasing the frequency and cost of maintenance.

How Glass Block Windows are Installed

While installing glass block windows is considered an easier job than installing a pane-glass window, it's still important the job is done with skill and care. Later we'll go over some tips for finding the right company to install your glass block windows. The hardest part comes at the beginning, in removing the existing window. The old sash and jamb must be pried out, which often requires sawing, prying, and chiseling. The entire frame material, whether wood or metal, needs to be taken out, along with any remaining filler used to originally cement the frame.

If needed, concrete is mortared onto the bottom of the cleared sill to ensure a flat surface and add another water barrier. Next, the glass block window is settled onto either a bed of mortar or temporary wood blocks. The glass block is leveled and squared, then wedged in place with wood shims while the rest of the window is mortared into place. Shims and blocks are then removed and their spaces are filled with mortar.



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Costs vs. Savings



Surprisingly, despite the many advantages of glass block windows, the cost of having them installed is less than putting in traditional windows. [According to Home Advisor](#), a new pane-glass window costs an average of \$500, while a new glass block window costs an average of about \$150 for a basement window and \$500.00 for a bathroom window. Of course, the exact cost depends on a number of factors you should discuss with your window professionals.

As we've already discussed, glass block windows tend to last longer and need less maintenance than their pane-glass counterparts, so they're going to save you some money in that sense, but the real savings come from heating and cooling savings due to glass block windows' superior insulating capacity. The website [Proud Green Home](#) says that replacing a double-pane window with an Energy Star rated glass block window can save you up to \$250 a year, and replacing a single-pane window can save you up to \$500 a year!

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Choosing the Right Glass Block Windows Company

As with any home renovation project, when you're seeking out a Michigan glass block company to install your windows it's important to do your homework. Invest some time up front finding the right company and it will save you trouble in the long run. Before hiring a company, research the following:

- How long have they been in business?
- Are they licensed?
- Are they insured?
- What do their past customers have to say?
- Are they members of the Better Business Bureau and what is their rating?
- Read any online reviews that they have as well to give you a better feel for the company.



After choosing and meeting with your contractor, there are new questions you need to ask them, to make sure you understand what will happen before and after the job:

- What is the final price and when is the money due?
- Are there any building code concerns?
- What are the terms of the contract?
- Does the company guarantee their work?
- Does the window manufacturer offer a warranty?

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We hope this buyer's guide has helped you discover the many benefits of installing glass block windows in your basement or bathroom. Pleasant to the senses and the pocketbook, these simple and sturdy alternatives to traditional windows are sure to prove themselves through the years to come if you give them the chance.

**Still have questions or like a FREE Estimate?
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