



Contractor Jim Landreth turns abandoned country churches into homes. "I fell in love with the big spaces inside," he says.

Heavenly Revivals: Turning Churches Into Homes

Contractor Jim Landreth recently remodeled two abandoned country churches and is working on a third.

The Almena, Wis., man fell into the church niche after earning a Masters degree in architecture at 57, after a successful career as a builder and ski hill owner. He was unwilling to relocate to pursue his new career, and wanted to find something unique nearby. He became aware of a growing number of abandoned historic churches due to accessibility requirements and growing congregations.

"I fell in love with the big spaces inside," Landreth says. His first church was the East Balsam Baptist Church. He completely gutted it to the studs, as he does with all the old churches.

"I'm constructing a new home inside an old shell," he says.

He reuses as many of the materials of the former church as he can. In the Balsam Lake Church, for example, he carefully removed the century-old Southern yellow pine floor, cleaned and reinstalled it. He restores old light fixtures and re-purposes wainscoting into cabinets and decorative elements throughout the home.

Landreth saves money where he can, basing designs on materials available from local lumberyards and home improvement stores rather than having them custom made at higher prices.

"I like to make something special out of very ordinary materials," he says. For example, at Balsam Lake, he used ordinary slate for the fireplace, then made it sparkle artistically with an overlay of copper rivets.

Landreth also installs low maintenance siding and windows on his buildings and pays attention to areas where there would be air leaks - often between the walls and roof. He rounds off the junction into an attractive cove, which allows for more heat-saving insulation. He installs air exchangers and lots of insulation to make the buildings as energy-efficient as possible.

Besides being the architect, Landreth does some of the finish work, but hires others to do the bulk of the restoration.

Currently, he's remodeling his oldest project, an 1887 Lutheran church that was moved from Cumberland, Wis., to his property on Sand Lake. Gutting it was like opening a Christmas present, Landreth says. Above the dropped ceiling tiles he discovered a rare, barrel-vaulted ceiling.

Former parishioners of the churches are pleased that the old houses of worship have been beautifully and respectfully remodeled, Landreth says. One parishioner financially supported transforming the second church.

With the slowdown of the housing market, the first two church/homes are still on the market for \$295,000 and \$499,360. Landreth's website includes a slideshow of interior and exterior photos of the homes.

Landreth is confident they will be sold because the buildings are quality homes.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jim Landreth, BLDG ART, 1196 4 1/4 St., Almena, Wis. 54805 (ph 715 357-3950; www.bldgart.com).



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Big New Mower Designed For Ditches

The new Highline RCH Mower allows you to drive your tractor safely on the roadway while mowing steep ditches. Its compact design provides enhanced maneuverability around obstacles, according to Highline Manufacturing in Vonda, Sask.

The ruggedly built rotary cutter has a patented floating variable offset hitch (left, right, or center) instead of the separate tow hitch design found on traditional mowers.

"It allows the mower to be moved from the left of the tractor to the right with a hydraulic lever," says Highline's Industrial sales manager Rob Laskowski. "We have a full 120 degree swing behind the tractor, enabling you to easily reach more places with it."

The unit has unique, patented twin axle walking caster wheels on the center section, designed to follow steep ditch angles. Automatic wing locks allow the operator to lower, raise and lock the outer wings of the mower from the safety of the tractor cab.

Symmetrical cutting decks allow for a more even cut by maintaining a common tip speed for all blades. This design eliminates uneven stress on the gearboxes, according to Laskowski.

"The flat design of the double-plated decks are also easy to clean, which helps prevent weed contamination," he adds. "Also, double safety chains on the decks greatly improve containment of rocks and debris."

The Highline RCH Mower comes configured for either a single point or a 2-point hook-up, and it offers standard laminated tires or optional aircraft tires.

"Enhanced options like Independent Wing Lift, Temperature Sensors on all gearboxes,



Highline RCH rotary cutter has a floating variable offset hitch that allows you to drive your tractor safely on the roadway while mowing steep ditches.

and Gradient Over-ride, greatly improve the operator's efficiency," Laskowski adds.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Highline Manufacturing, P. O. Box 307, Vonda, Sask., Canada S0K 4N0 (ph 800 665-2010 or 306 258-2233; fax 306 258-2010; insidesales@highlinemfg.com; http://highlinemfg.com).