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The Citizen. Auburn, New York

• A CUT ABOVE THE REST •

Woodsmith turns aged timber into gold



Photo Provided

Douglas Holland designs and installs floors such as this one, made from wood taken from old barns.



Mathew Hamton / The Citizen

Douglas Holland, owner of Levanna Restoration Lumber, holds before and after samples of antique elm. Holland rescues antique Barnwood and then turned it into superior quality flooring, wall or ceiling treatments or other home accents. He said the richness and the character of the wood comes from its age, which is something that cannot be replicated in traditional commercial materials.

Don't burn that barn

LOUISE HOFFMAN BROACH
The Citizen

AUBURN — Some people look at the wood of an old ramshackle barn and see a nuisance. Douglas Holland sees warm, inviting floors, rich patina, beautiful character and color.

Holland, of South Street Road, owns Levanna Restoration Lumber. He rescues sometimes-centuries-old barnwood and turns it into distinctive flooring, wall panels, furniture and other wood accents.

The business is named after Holland's first project, a barn he took down on Levanna Road in Ledyard almost two years ago. "This is wood that was harvested, some of it, 180 years ago," he said. "It's what everybody dies for."

The barn wood's original timber harvest ranges from 90 to 200 years ago. Many of the barns Holland salvages were built during a time that he refers to as "the settlement period" of Central New York.

"Most of the stock is original forest, slow-growth timber," he said. "The impression that everyone has when they think of barnwood is of weathered wood. But this is wood that grew in our forests hundreds of years ago that I save and then restore."

Although the beams, barn siding, flooring, even the horse stall wood may start out rough when Holland gets it, it does not stay that way. The majority of what he turns around becomes pristine, restored hardwoods and softwoods that are resawed, remilled and taken to a kiln.

Everything that Holland does from that point on is custom ordered, although he will sell rough boards to people who are interested in doing their own work.

He points to nail holes (he pulls all the nails out himself) and the intricacies of the wood grain — as well as the inconsistencies of color — as being part of the charm of the wood. Some of Holland's projects include floors in cottages and homes along Skaneateles Lake. He has been recommended to clients through Andy Ramsgard, an architect with offices in that village. Holland's work isn't cheap — hardwoods start at \$8.95 a square foot, softwoods are slightly less.

"The character it has, the story of the building it came from, and the wood, the tightness of the grain, it's just something you don't see anymore," he said.

He works at the business almost full-time, after spending the past 20 years as a draftsman.

He also has dabbled in various aspects of the construction trade, including working as an estimator for a roofing company. After being what he called a "pencil pusher" he decided to turn his love of wood rescue into a business.

He finds the barns all over Central New York: right now he is involved in dismantling structures in Phelps, Ontario County, and

Baldwinsville, Onondaga County. People hear about what he does and contact him. He will also hear, through word-of-mouth, that someone is considering taking down an antique barn, and he hurries to stop them before they either dispose of or destroy the wood.

People aren't paid for the lumber, and Holland doesn't charge the owners anything for taking the buildings down. He said it breaks his heart when he learns of antique barnwood that is destroyed because someone decides to have the building burned. He does not accept every project he's offered, and steers away from barns that have collapsed or have beams that have been exposed to the weather for many years. "Some of the beams like that, you can put your hand through," he said.

But others, including those from a barn in Borodino, south of Skaneateles, have been turned into flooring for a house being built on the property. "Beech from one of those barns is now part of the floor of the home," he said.

Holland said the allure of antique barnwood is that it's part of history.

It's reinforcing the recycling effort, saving more trees from being cut, and incorporating wood that is so special and rare that it has to be sought out.

"It's owning some of the best wood ever grown," he said.

What's available?

Some of the wood that Levanna Restoration Lumber offers:

- Grand Antique oak, ash, beech or elm:** Natural signs of antiquity are revealed through a rich patina and tight grain.
- Pioneer Plank:** Milled from antique hardwood beams, it's a blend of original broad ax craftsmanship. It almost resembles rough shingles, and is used mainly on ceilings or for gable treatments.
- Ghostface:** Selective screening and partial planing results in this look. There are wine-colored knots, skipped gradations of gray with darker gray surface fractures. The patina is caramel-colored and there may be remnants of paint, adding to the character.

Seeing is believing



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Auburn, New York

Ph/Fax: (315) 252-6817
E-mail: info@LevannaRL.com