

The Sanctuary

During the Middle Ages, upon crossing the threshold of Østerlars Church, one would enter a very different type of sanctuary. The lightness and the light gracing the church's modern interior are difficult to compare with the atmosphere of the round Romanesque church. Over time the sanctuary furnishings and ornamentation have changed, but for more than 900 years the round church's walls have been the setting for the congregation's religious services, and the changing interior reflects dynamic religious observance and persevering love.

Restoration and refurbishment

The church was restored in 1891–1892, and local architect Mathias Bidstrup left his mark on features such as the church windows, which in the apse he returned to their original Romanesque appearance. In 1955–1956, Østerlars Church underwent sweeping refurbishment once again, and this time architect Rolf Graae was responsible for the new church interior. The church floor is laid with "Hasleklinker" floor tiles and the pews and gallery are made of matching oak. When the floor was relaid in 1891 and again in 1955, old coins were unearthed in the fill beneath the flooring – the oldest of which is datable to Valdemar I the Great's old Scanian coin series from 1157, which was the year when Valdemar become sole regent after the *Feast of Blood in Roskilde* and the *Battle of Grathe Hede*.

This is how the church apse looked before it was refurbished in 1955. The altarpiece is different from the one used today, and the front of the stone altar is covered with a decorative antependium. The carpet and mosaic tiles also express a different style compared with the existing simplicity and lightness.



The church's beautiful organ was made by the organ builders Marcussen & Søn of Aabenraa, Denmark. The organ has pedals and two manuals (keyboards) and is set up with 15 voices. The organ has two façades and the pipes in the front façade are ornamented with gold leaf.

To the right of the organ is a door that is no longer in use, but which was used by women entering the church during the Middle Ages. The church's present door to the south was solely for men during the Middle Ages. The medieval separation of the genders continued inside the church, and in medieval churchyards women are buried to the north and men to the south.

New and old

Today, the limestone Communion table is the only remaining feature of the original sanctuary decoration. The baptismal font, frescoes, pulpit, altarpiece, organ, gallery, chandeliers and small wall lamps, as well as the flooring and pews, were all added later on. One of the most recent additions is a glass baptismal basin, donated by Pete Hunner and Majbritt Jönsson of Baltic Sea Glass in Gudhjem in the spring of 2016. The baptismal basin can be seen during religious ceremonies.

Stained glass windows

Today, Østerlars Church is furnished with large windows that allow plenty of daylight into the sanctuary. These windows were not part of the original church. Romanesque churches built in the early Middle Ages had small windows high in the wall that were usually few and far between. Back then, moving about in the sanctuary was a gloomier experience, but in return the space was lit by candlelight. Today, window glass is a matter of course, but few medieval buildings had glass panes. Some churches even had stained glass windows, which were quite costly and unusual for that time. These shards of stained glass were found among the fieldstones in the church's original flooring, indicating that Østerlars Church once had beautiful stained glass windows in the apse and chancel. When daylight shone through the windows, it must have created a veritable play of rainbow colours in the sanctuary.

The seven small chandeliers suspended from the vaulted ceiling of the round nave are replicas of a Renaissance chandelier from Ruts Church. Rumour has it that the Ruts chandelier originally hung at Hammershus, but was moved to Ruts Church later on. Østerlars Church has been charging visitors to the church a modest admission fee since 1926. The initial admission charges were used to install electric lights in the church in 1928.



The medieval church had no pews. Being seated during a church service is a custom which began after the Reformation in 1536. But a brick bench has been discovered along the curved church walls, so the elderly and weak did not have to stand up. Note also the church's original fieldstone floor, exposed here before the restoration in 1955.