University of Michigan Honors Legacy of Lee A. Gill as Ambatana Afro-American Multicultural Lounge Wins National Award

Ambatana earned first place from the Association of University Interior Designers for its 2024 renovation, recognizing its cultural and historical significance.

Painting of Lee A. Gill displayed inside Ambatana, the Afro-American Multicultural Lounge at the University of Michigan's South Quad, honoring his foundational leadership and advocacy in the space's creation.

ANN ARBOR, MI, UNITED STATES, January 13, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Ambatana, the Afro-American Multicultural Lounge at the University of Michigan, has earned national recognition for its 2024 renovation, receiving first place at the Association of University Interior Designers' 2025 awards ceremony in the Student Life and Academic Affairs category for projects under 5,000 square feet. The honor underscores the university's continued excellence in multicultural space design and the enduring legacy of Lee A. Gill, whose early leadership and advocacy were instrumental in the lounge's founding.

Presented at the Association of University Interior Designers' annual awards ceremony in New Orleans, the first-place honor recognizes the 2024 renovation of Ambatana, located in South Quad. The award highlights the project's design excellence, cultural expression, and engagement with student life.

Established in 1972 in response to the first Black Action Movement, Ambatana was the first residence hall lounge at the University of Michigan intentionally designed to reflect African American culture and history. Gill, a South Quad resident at the time and the first Black president of the Central Student Government, played a pivotal role in advocating for the creation of the space. His leadership helped shape Ambatana as a place of cultural affirmation, dialogue, and belonging for generations of students.

"Ambatana has always represented more than a physical space," Gill said. "It stands as a

testament to student voice, cultural recognition, and the power of advocacy to create lasting institutional change."

The award-winning renovation builds upon that legacy. Completed in summer 2024, the updated lounge integrates contemporary design with historical grounding, incorporating original artwork by Detroit-based artists selected specifically for the space. These new installations were created to engage current and future students while honoring the history and purpose of Ambatana as a living cultural environment.

Interior view of Ambatana, the Afro-American Multicultural Lounge at the University of Michigan's South Quad, highlighting the 2024 award-winning renovation and a painting honoring Lee A. Gill.

Wide interior view of Ambatana, the Afro-American Multicultural Lounge at the University of Michigan's South Quad, showcasing the award-winning 2024 renovation, integrated artwork, and community-centered design.

The Association of University Interior Designers recognized Ambatana for its thoughtful approach to storytelling through design, its collaborative development process, and its ability to foster community within a compact footprint. The recognition also brings the University of Michigan's total number of national awards for multicultural lounges to 11 since the institution renewed its commitment to renovating these spaces in 2014.

In the same awards category, the university's CAMEO Multicultural Lounge in Couzens Hall received second place, further affirming the institution's leadership in culturally responsive campus design.

University officials credited the success of the Ambatana renovation to close collaboration between Housing and Student Life Facilities, the Community Connections and Engagement department, and Student Life Capital Projects. The project reflects an ongoing commitment to ensuring that multicultural spaces remain vibrant, relevant, and student-centered.

For Gill, the national recognition represents as both a professional honor and a deeply personal

milestone.

“To see Ambatana continue to evolve while remaining true to its roots is incredibly meaningful,” he said. “This recognition validates the vision that began more than 50 years ago and confirms its importance for today’s students and those still to come.”

Additional information about Ambatana and the University of Michigan’s multicultural lounges is available through Housing and Student Life.

Another interior view of Ambatana, the Afro-American Multicultural Lounge at the University of Michigan’s South Quad, highlighting integrated artwork and the nationally recognized 2024 renovation.

About Lee A. Gill, J.D.

Lee A. Gill, J.D., is vice president for Access and Opportunity at the University of Louisville, where he serves on the president’s cabinet and leads institution-wide efforts advancing equity, access, and student success. A nationally recognized higher education leader, Gill has held senior executive roles at multiple research universities and received the National Diversity Visionary Award from Insight Into Diversity magazine for his contributions to inclusive excellence.

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