



## THE FUTURE OF DESIGN? FULLY ACCESSIBLE.

**Michigan Architectural Foundation** scholarship recipient *Ellis Wills-Begley* wants to change the conversation on inclusive design.

For Ellis Wills-Begley, University of Michigan architecture student, a classroom discussion on accessible design opened his eyes to better understanding the architectural needs of disabled people, and stimulated interest in learning more about how architecture serves as a catalyst for positive social change.

Wills-Begley, of Traverse City, received Michigan Architectural Foundation's first Richard M. and Sidney K. Robinson Scholarship. The \$3,500 scholarship is awarded to a University of Michigan student entering their fourth year of study, who 'aspires to a

career that combines the roles of citizen and artist.' Wills-Begley impressed the scholarship jury with an outstanding portfolio of work and his desire to anticipate the architectural needs of disabled people.

"By seeing design through the lens of disability, you become aware of how physical barriers can become social barriers. said Wills-Begley. "While the Americans With Disabilities Act has helped greatly in addressing existing structures, accessibility has the potential to

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This is a great time to explore, and to remember that in architecture, virtually anything is possible.

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be reframed as a creative design opportunity, in which a proactive and inclusive approach augments everyone’s experience in a space, regardless of physical or psychological abilities.”

With his student American Institute of Architects chapter, Wills-Begley helped start the group Initiative for Inclusive Design. The group’s goal is to increase the dialogue on accessible design, and help students influence the way designing for disabled people is approached. This group provides opportunities to expand their thinking and design skills through research, site visits, lectures, workshops, interdisciplinary design charrettes, and student-led projects.

Wills-Begley’s love of architecture started early – his father is a residential architect, and his mother an interior designer, who share a home studio. “Growing up, I learned how significant architecture can be, especially when you are designing someone’s house.”

He also is fascinated with the role culture and history have played in architecture around the world, and has traveled abroad with the University of Michigan Men’s Glee Club and a University of Michigan travel studio. “Traveling to other countries has lent a tremendous level of respect for the people who live to make the city work. You also

develop a better understanding of the architecture’s physical and social role, regardless of geography.”

What advice would Wills-Begley share with other architecture students? “Have an open perspective; learn from those different than yourself and engage with students studying things other than architecture. The larger your circle and awareness of the human condition, the less likely you are to forget who you are designing for, and the importance of architecture’s broader context.” Begley added, “Also, experiment with design, push your boundaries, imagination, and creativity. At your desk, anything is possible.”